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Men, Women and Cats

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Dorothy Van Doren

Men, Women and Cats

Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.
New York

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To
Hedwig,
Irita,
Freda,
and
Marcelle

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Men, Women and Cats

1

Perish the Thought

From time to time we are enlightened about the sort of world we may expect to be living in, now that a new decade of the twentieth century is upon us. Within the next ten years, if we live through them, what marvels of gadgetry will become familiar to us.

One of the most upsetting of these predictions was written by a responsible economist and published in a Sunday supplement not long ago. Not all of these innovations, the writer said, would come at once; but by 1970 the most important of these would be here and a few would arrive sooner, next year, next month, perhaps tomorrow.

Here are some of the things he promised us: A flexible house with collapsible walls. If you don't like the shape of the living room, push the wall a bit and make it different.

If you don't like your town, pack your house up and erect it somewhere else. Since it will probably be mass-produced, you can swap part of it with somebody for part of his house that you like better. Junior has left home for college; let's turn in his room and get a bowling alley. This house has, among its other wonders, plastic plumbing—of course, everything is plastic these days—and sprayed-on carpeting. I don't know what you do if you decide you can't abide the dining-room rug.

This little dream of home is naturally air-conditioned, winter and summer. You never need to open a window. The air inside your house is "mountain fresh"—and doubtless if you prefer the smell of the seaside you can just dump a little salt into the air-conditioner. If you like to open the windows on a spring morning and watch the curtains blowing, a fan will blow them for you. If you want to smell the lilies of the valley under the east window, you can walk out into the yard. Of course if you are going to move house, lot, walls, and so forth around all the time, you'll never have time to get a good lily bed started.

Your house is soundproofed. You won't hear a shout from one room to another. An intercom system will take care of communication. Nobody will yell downstairs: "Have you seen that gray shirt of mine? I say have you seen that gray shirt—why it went to the laundry a month ago. Yes, I have looked in the drawer—what's that you say?" If one of the walls falls on Father when he is pushing it north by northeast and knocks him out, he will

have to wait till he can get up and push the button for help; if the three-year-old falls out of the window he may as well postpone his cry until Mother happens to come outdoors. She'll never hear him otherwise.

Let me quote further from this article: "A small box about a foot square in your front hall [and you'd better not monkey with the front hall or you'll interfere with the system] is the electronic control center of the house. It turns on the panel lighting when you enter a room [if you like to sit in the dark you are out of luck], maintains a comfortable temperature in every room [comfortable for whom?], and figures out your monthly bills [for me the great improvement would be not to have any monthly bills, but that is doubtless for the seventies and eighties]. It wakes you up with your own kind of music, starts the coffee, warms up the car, and lets the cat in."

I will not take this up point by point and list my objections to it. I will only say that I never want to be waked up by any kind of music yet heard by man, and our cat (cats) are not out at night, they are very much in; otherwise how would the birds ever get a chance to eat their breakfasts?

Wake up to music, indeed! How I should hate it; how I hate the very idea of it. You set your music gadget the night before, to rock 'n' roll, jazz, or the *Ninth Symphony*. But how do I know, even if I wanted any music at all on waking, which most emphatically I do not, that I should want in the morning what I had selected the night before. Of course it may be that you do not need to set your

gadget at all; it will know what sort of noise you want to be wakened by; but if it gets to know me at all well, it will learn that I prefer to sleep in the morning, with no noise whatever. Not that this happens to me very often, but I like to think it may when wearily I climb into bed.

When you go shopping in the sixties, you will not need to go into the super supermarket. You can just sit in your car, read your shopping list into a recording system, and presently the items will appear at the car door. This is all very well for those people who remember to bring their shopping lists with them; if you leave them on the kitchen table, as I frequently do, you are in trouble. Besides, beyond the basic items like butter and coffee and soap, how do I know what I want till I see it? The recording system will not tell me if the lettuce is Boston or iceberg, fresh or limp; if the green beans look younger than the zucchini; if the grapes fall off the bunch when you pick them up; if they have any new crackers or other tidbits; and when I look at the shelves I remember I need peanuts and olives or a can of black bean soup maybe, for lunch, and that means a lemon. Can any automatic system tell me these things?

After a hard day of pushing buttons and speaking into dictaphones, you decide at the last minute to have guests for dinner. The guests, naturally, will just drop in—by helicopter. You excuse yourself for a minute and dinner is served—"thanks to 'meal-in-a-minute' electronic cooking." But if you are smart you will have set the table, prepared the drinks tray, got out the ice, put the coffee in

the percolator, and made the salad before you start your meal-in-a-minute. Otherwise the dinner, whatever it is, may get cold or more likely burned up while you rush around doing the other chores.

Finally you go to bed. Let me give you a final quote: "You wipe a stain off your suit, throw away your paper shirt and underwear and step for a minute on the health-checking machine. It quickly records your weight, blood pressure, pulse, and key nervous reactions, and flashes a red light if it finds you should be seeing your doctor."

This I will take up point by point. Wiping a stain off your suit is doubtless intended for men, but your dress could get stained, too; or could it? How, in this world of magic, could a stain survive? Haven't we a machine to prevent stains, and if not, what kind of decade are the sixties going to be after all? I don't think I'd like paper underwear, I really don't. Mayn't I keep my old nylons; after all, they're synthetic, too. It isn't as if I wanted to keep something real, like silk. Now for the health machine: in the first place, as any weight watcher knows (and aren't we all!), the time to weigh yourself is in the morning, when you first get up. You weigh less then. If I found I had gained a couple of pounds, my pulse and key nervous reactions would jump up several notches, and if the red light started flashing for the doctor, I shouldn't sleep a wink.

No, I'm against it. I'm against all of it. I want a house built on a permanent foundation, cyclone proof, and with a good cellar to put things in. I like the living room to

stay as it is. I don't like things that light lights for me, or turn on heat and cold. It is bad enough to have to ride in automatic elevators. I like to do my own shopping. Incidentally, I forgot to mention that in connection with shopping you won't need any money, not in this new world of the sixties. Naturally; but don't get ideas. The millennium has not arrived and will not in the next decade. In the super supermarket you get a punch card which tells you how much you have spent; it tells the bank, too, and charges your account accordingly. Once a month you are notified of the damage. But "don't worry about overdrawing; the computer can analyze your credit history in a jiffy and issue a loan."

This, on the face of it, is simply nonsense. Suppose you haven't any credit; suppose you haven't any bank account; and if you have, do you want a computer nosing about your private affairs? Suppose, like me, you are so benighted that you rather like to pay cash for groceries? Maybe you could put the money in an envelope with the punch card and mail it back to the shop, but I am sure it would be considered most irregular. After all, aren't we living in a gadget-controlled world; and aren't we supposed to like it!

The trouble with all of the prognostications of super machines, from H. G. Wells on down (does anybody read Wells today, and if not, why not? He thought of a lot of these tricks long before our time), is that they do not take into consideration the delightful and I hope ineradicable quirks in human nature. We, us people that is, are

not machines; not yet. Sometimes we might like a machine to make life more comfortable, sometimes not. Surely I am not the only woman who one day will telephone her order to the grocery and expect it to be delivered, and another day, in spring maybe, will love to wander about from store to store, looking at the lettuce here and the labels on the soup there; turning up her nose at packaged meats yet thinking that steak looks pretty good. Should we have steak? The last time we did it cost five dollars and thirty-seven cents for five people; how is the budget and did I put that ten-dollar bill in my purse or didn't I? Was there a ten-dollar bill? Ah, me; better have ground chuck; or maybe spareribs.

And so on. There are times when I want to light every lamp in the house; there are times when one by the sofa will do me, provided I have a good book in which the print is not too fine. It would scare me if I went into a room and the lights appeared automatically. I am even made a little uncomfortable by those doors in the present supermarkets which open when you approach. I am told there is an electric eye or something which controls them, but I am not sure. As with the automatic elevator in which I suspect a little man may be lurking, I think somebody or something is working the doors and there will come a day when It will feel out of sorts and instead of opening the door with a figurative bow when I need to walk through, It will slam it in my face. Serves me right, too, for not pushing the door open in the regular way.

Of course even today in the benighted beginnings of

the sixties I rely on certain gadgets. The blender is a lot of fun; you can take the most unlikely leftovers out of the refrigerator and mush them up into a palatable soup; we call it icebox soup and try to guess what is in it. The refrigerator itself is a gadget, come to think of it, and one that I shouldn't like to get on without. I could; actually, I did, when we first had our house in the country and there was no electricity. We piped the cold spring water through a copper-lined box in the pantry. We put the food in stone crocks standing in the water. It worked very well except in hot weather, when you couldn't rely on the milk. That was in the days when milk kept too long would get sour; you could then make pot cheese out of it. Milk today can hardly be induced to sour; you have to keep it for weeks, in or out of the refrigerator. The box in the pantry didn't have to be defrosted, though now and then I let the water out and gave it a good scrubbing.

I am not really against gadgets, used in moderation. But I want to use them; I don't want them to use me. No red light is going to tell me when to go to the doctor. I'll pay my own bills, thank you. When I get around to it.

What troubles me most, I suppose, is the thought that if the "progress" I have described above is going to be offered to us in the sixties, what will the twenty-first century, hardly more than a generation off, have to offer? My granddaughter will be only forty-three when 2001 comes around. What will her life be like? Will she nourish herself by a pill containing all the necessary foods and all the vitamins; will she move about by thinking herself in

a new place and then being there; will she talk to a friend, not by telephone, but by pressing a button and seeing an image on the wall, probably in curl papers? Or by 2001 will everybody be born with curly hair? That would be an improvement!

I don't really believe it. If gadgets threaten to overwhelm us, I believe we will toss them out. Not by going back to the seventeenth century; that would be foolish; but by using them with common sense. Once in a while by not using them at all. The other morning my husband, who gets breakfast while I dress and put the bedroom in order, asked me how I liked the coffee; was it strong enough? We are fussy about coffee and try to find the darkest and freshest brew. I said the coffee seemed unusually good. He grinned; it was made, he told me, from some coffee beans that had been in a can for well over a year, maybe two years. He had put them in the old-fashioned coffee grinder we keep these days for decoration. The ancient beans, freshly ground, made excellent coffee. We both laughed.

I must now go downstairs and taste the soup. It was composed of the water in which I cooked a tongue, with carrots and onions, tomato paste, a few herbs, a handful of dried mushrooms from France, and some of those pretty little pasta shells. I think I will serve it with grated parmesan cheese and call it minestrone. It was not touched, in the making, by a machine.

2

The World I Was Born Into

I WAS born at the tail-end of the nineteenth century, in San Francisco, California. A house with the same number stands on the same street, but whether or not that particular house escaped the Great Fire and Earthquake I do not know. However, the hill that leads up to the house must be the same, a typical San Francisco hill, sharp and steep, and I remember my mother telling me that it was a great sight to see the Chinese laundrymen running like sixty down that steep hill with the bundle of wash on their heads. I have a picture of my father taken about the time I was born, sitting in a Victorian carved chair by a table on which a silk scarf is draped. The scarf is held firmly to the table by an ornate tall lamp (a very expensive type of Victorian antique today), with a filagree brass base and a tall marble standard. At the top of the

standard there is a sort of font, also brass, under the elaborate fringed shade.

The lamp, naturally, burned kerosene.

When my parents wanted to get about town, if it was not too far, they walked; if it was far, they went in a carriage with a pair of horses.

Food was cooked on a wood-burning cast-iron stove.

The kitchen being on the floor below, the waitress carried the meals on a tray up to the dining room.

Not to make too fine a point of all this, let me say we were not unusual in using oil lamps and wood-burning cookstoves. We were not quaint because we moved about in a carriage drawn by horses.

Everybody was just like us. In that world of the dying nineteenth century there were no automobiles (or none that most people had ever seen); houses were sometimes lit by gas but it was more common to use kerosene lamps; almost nobody had a gas stove in the kitchen; lots of houses still pumped cold water from a cistern into the kitchen sink and depended for hot water on the reservoir at the side of the cookstove.

We had a bathroom but plenty of people did not; and our bathtub was tin, painted white on the inside; the pipes in the bathroom were enclosed in a wooden cupboard. As a small child I can remember that "open plumbing" with pipes exposed as they are today was considered a splendid improvement.

In that far-off time, but not really so far off after all, hardly more than a half a century, there were no electric

refrigerators, electric irons, or washing machines. Let me amend that: in the Farmers' Museum at Cooperstown, New York, there is a washing machine made by a farmer for his wife, two wooden tubs with a paddle that thumped up and down. It was made in the eighteen seventies, as I recall, and it is unique. There were, then, a few washing machines, but they were not factory made. The ice wagon was a fine thing for city children to hitch a ride on. Up-to-date people had an icebox. Less fortunate families put the food in a cupboard, with a plate over it if they were fussy; country housewives, of course, put the milk and butter in the springhouse.

Young people got together in the evening and sang or played games. Almost every girl could play the piano and many of the boys had a banjo or a guitar. It was a rather nice sort of entertainment for an evening. Since everybody got up early, ten o'clock bedtime was not unusual. Some folks went to bed at nine. The boys walked the girls home, taking them by the elbow at street crossings. A very bold boy might ask for a kiss at her front door; often he did not get it; sometimes the girl would be angry at the very thought. There was less juvenile delinquency in those days, although every so often Something Would Happen, right under the eye of a chaperon perhaps, and a girl would have to be sent away in disgrace. Her father might put on a Never-Darken-My-Door-Again scene or her mother might contrive to get the whole matter taken care of in some way or other, beginning if possible with a hasty marriage; but it was all very sad, the

neighbors gossiped, mean things were said, and more fortunate young ladies looked the other way when the erring sister passed by.

There were no motion pictures. Imagine it! I can remember very well the first time I went to a movie; it was in a long narrow building like a loft; it cost five cents; men on horses were always riding away in the picture; and a man in a dark corner to the left of the screen played appropriate selections on the piano, including rat-a-tat-tat when the horses galloped into view. The year was probably 1905.

There were no radios. I was graduated from college before people—some people—had small sets with earphones. Our family was rather slow to take up new gadgets, so my children were four or five years old before we bought a little Atwater Kent that fitted neatly into the bookcase and played "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" as a surprise on Christmas morning.

However, my father did have a gramophone, not with one horn but with two. The cylindrical records slipped over a disk; you had to put two fingers inside the records to lift them and my father always dusted them off very carefully with cotton batting before sliding them onto the machine. I was not allowed to touch them. Never.

Of course there was no television, but everyone knows that. Television began in the memory of teen-agers today, along with hi-fi, automatic defrosting, Waring blenders, and atom bombs.

When I was born, the Spanish-American war had not

yet begun, the Russo-Japanese war was still in the future, and we were dreaming of a century of peace instead of the Balkan wars of 1912, the First World War of 1914–18, the Second World War of 1939–45, and the Korean conflict in 1950, not to mention a lot of smaller wars hardly worth noting except that of course people were killed in them, property was destroyed, and families were bereaved. History was a lot easier to remember in those days. Actually, the American Civil War, being very real in the memories of thousands of men and women still living, was studied in considerably more detail than it is today, when there are so many other wars to learn about.

When I was a child old enough to be sent to the grocery store, the clerk weighed out the sugar or the flour and tied it up in a brown paper bag. Coffee and tea were kept in big black japanned canisters with gold lettering on them, and measured out with a scoop. Everybody had his own coffee grinder and nobody had so much as heard of a tea bag. Bread was not wrapped, although in summer the baker sometimes draped mosquito netting over the cakes to keep the flies off. The milk cart was a common sight even in fairly large cities; you took your pitcher out and the milk was dipped out of the big can with a quart measure. I can't remember a time, however, when our milk did not come in bottles.

My father, who was of an inventive turn of mind, had an idea that folding paper boxes would be better for transporting produce from the market to the neighborhood store than the wooden crates then in use. He spent

a lot of time trying to design such a box and almost had it perfected before he died. This was in 1910 and there were no collapsible paper cartons in use at that time.

There were naturally no plastic containers. You opened a package quite easily by removing the string. We are much more sanitary today, we live longer, we have conquered many diseases such as smallpox and tuberculosis, although several fatal ones have sprung up in the mortality tables. This is a good thing; the world will shortly be crowded enough, without everyone living forever.

One day not long ago I mentioned some of the things I grew up without, like movies, the radio, television, and automobiles, to a young lady of sixteen. Her eyes grew round, her jaw dropped. "What did you *do!*" she said in stark wonder. Her grandmother, who was helping me remember those ancient days, put it very neatly: "We lived," she replied serenely.

The teen-ager, of course, was not convinced. She could not imagine a world so different from the one she took for granted. Just as I cannot imagine, except as a literary exercise, the world of the eighteenth century. You read by candlelight; the fireplace provided what heat you got; the horse was not then a rich man's toy, which sadly enough in the United States it is rapidly becoming, but a necessity of locomotion, not to mention the farmer's friend, without which he would have had to dig and plough himself, as his grandfather probably had.

The tremendous strides the human race has made in the last few centuries are beyond belief, except that we

believe them religiously. We believe in progress. There was a time when for half the year women and children hardly left their shelters; short days were dangerous days; indoors there was a little warmth and one was used to the smells. Today many people feel that life is insupportable without an air-conditioner. But at least the streets are not dangerous at night; most of the time. We have a gadget for nearly everything. If the gadget gets out of fix, to be sure, life becomes almost more difficult than it was in the days before the gadgets were invented. A complete electric kitchen, water system, and heating plant takes care of almost everything; except when the power goes off, and then cooking over the fireplace becomes an unaccustomed nuisance. Airplanes are much, much faster than trains—when they run on schedule; motor cars make the horse and carriage laughable, but don't try to drive into New York on a Sunday afternoon in summer.

Every age has its disadvantages and I would not want to return to a smoke-filled castle in the thirteenth century with dirty rushes on the floor and a board for a bed. Today we live better than kings did then, or at least more cleanly; and whether or not cleanliness is next to godliness, it is certainly comfortable. Of course we are still afraid, as people in those distant days were afraid; they of werewolves, evil spirits, and the very real dangers of no police force and very little central government; we of the unnamed horrors of science and, all too often, the irrational lawlessness of the young.

It may be a nostalgia for the days of my childhood, but

I sometimes think that the end of the nineteenth century was a rather pleasant compromise between the old days, manifestly disagreeable, and our own times, where progress has gotten a little out of hand. It was a cosy time to be alive, and not only for the well-to-do, as we were not. Not only were there no television commercials (bad breath, constipation, and sweaty underarms not being considered suitable for parlor conversation), but there was no telephone! Think of life without a telephone. We know a couple, both of whom are artists. They have built themselves a fine studio across the road from their house. Early in the morning, armed with a couple of sandwiches, they go to the studio and they may not return till dinnertime. The telephone in the house can ring all day if it likes; they do not hear it. There is no telephone in the studio. It is impossible for me to reach them during the day except by driving ten miles to their house and I should not think of so interrupting their work. So far there has been no hardship resulting from this harmless pretense of being out of reach of the world.

What if it were not a pretense? We all know somebody who has for a time retreated from his life in this particular way. He can't be reached, we say. That is, he can't be reached except by foot, horseback, mule train, or even perhaps by motor car; but since he doesn't want to be reached, we let him alone. It ought not to be necessary to be thus churlish in order to avoid certain aspects of modern life. What if the telephone were in operation only during certain hours of the day, leaving some hours free

from the strident and demanding summons? What if people wrote more letters, or even post cards? What if they didn't expect an answer to every inquiry ten seconds after it occurred to them?

In the world I was born into, almost nobody had a telephone and since nobody ever had had, we got along very well without. Our houses were not as hot as houses are today, but perhaps that was a good thing. Our food was not quite as fresh, and in winter we had no vegetables except the ubiquitous turnip, carrot, and beet—and of course the staple of them all, potatoes, unless you wanted to risk canned tomatoes. I like fresh vegetables and fresh fruit but on the whole I like them best in season and grown locally. The out-of-season strawberries from California have no taste; the too-early asparagus is woody, stringy, or watery; peas and beans brought, even by air, from a long distance are flat and tough; and the corn—it is best to pass quickly over the corn. My heart is wrung for people who cannot rush corn from the garden and plunge it into the pot just before dinner.

It was possible, in the late nineteenth century, to travel long distances by train, and on the whole the trains were comfortable, fast, and frequent. In the summer it was better to stay home, because a train trip with the windows open covered you with cinders. But it is better to stay home in the summer anyway. Stay home, keep the windows shut and the shades drawn, and make plenty of lemonade, chipping off bits of the block of ice the iceman left this morning, and life isn't too bad. If you are not ex-

pecting callers you can leave off your corsets and two of your three petticoats and just wear a wrapper.

I forgot the corsets! I forgot the high-buttoned shoes, the skirts that swept the ground, the tight sleeves, the breathless, pulled-in waists. I forgot the three petticoats. Maybe that end of the nineteenth century was a little too cosy, too snug. Let's just slip on a summer dress over shorts; never mind the petticoats; it may not be a cotton dress, just as our winter dresses may not be of honest wool or silk, but it's cool. Slip on the summer dress, put on a pair of sandals—you don't need stockings (shades of my grandmother!)—get a couple of ice cubes out of the refrigerator and put them into your drink of frozen orange juice. Then, having turned on the air-conditioner, you needn't even think of the heat. Just put your feet up and enjoy Progress. Don't think about television commercials; after all, the set doesn't turn on by itself; not yet anyway. Relax; be happy; you're a child of the twentieth century and the twentieth century isn't as young as it was, not by a long shot. If you are young enough and nobody makes any trouble, you may easily see the twenty-first. Are you comfortable?

But wasn't that the telephone? As soon as I get my feet up, the telephone is sure to ring.

3

You Must Have a Green Thumb

A LOT of tender, adulatory, and sentimental things have been written about gardens, many of which are untrue. The truth is that by and large to garden is to court calamity. Whether you are rash enough to garden in a serious way with a hillside to play around in or nurse a begonia plant on a window sill that is not quite sunny enough, either way it will all lead to trouble. The begonia will fall off the window sill on a hapless passer-by, you will be sued, and your liability will not cover begonias. The hillside—dear God, what cannot happen to it! Floods will wash it, ice will pile up on it in layers two feet thick, the sun will blast it, the drought will burn it, and every now and then a tornado will snuggle up to it and go whoosh. End of hillside.

All these things being freely admitted by any gardener

who has been in the business for more than eight seasons, it is a mystery to me why gardens persist. I even wonder why I persist. Leaving out my own experiences, which are no happier than those of others, take a few examples to which I was recently a witness. One garden, just replanted after years of neglect, was trampled by fourteen cows, all nursing mothers with big feet. The farmer said he was awfully sorry; there must have been a break in the fence. The garden's owner, after tearing out a good deal of her hair and making what repairs she could to holes the size of a two-quart basket, decided to plant a row of petunia plants along the edge of her ravaged bed; she had ordered them before the cows came and they were pretty little plants, with pink and purple and pale-blue blossoms. The rabbits loved them; it took them only one night, working no doubt in shifts from evening to sunrise, to eat off all the pink and purple and pale-blue flowers.

Take another case. On a round knoll within plain view of her house, a neighbor of ours had a little paradise. Myrtle and ajuga carpeted the ground; in the spring snowdrops and scilla poked up through the ground cover; very special lilacs, pinky-purple and dark-purple, grew off to one side of the knoll; laurel and azalea bloomed on the other. The ground cover and the shrubs grew and flourished because of the delicate shade of a gnarly, elderly pin oak that rose from the top of the knoll. What happened? Why, the oak blew over one stormy night, not only tearing the ground cover to ribbons, but exposing the shrubs to enough unaccustomed sun so that they got

all scrawny and miserable. It was a major, not to say costly operation to get the branches of the tree lopped off, cut up, and carted away. Our brave little gardener, of course, was not daunted. She trimmed back the poor shrubs, nursed the ground cover back to life, planted a couple of locusts where the pin oak had been, and hoped for the best. It wasn't her old knoll, but in time it would be nice. The ground cover responded to her tender care; the laurel and azalea, after a couple of years of sulking, began to bloom again. The following winter was the worst in our area in fifty years. There was no snow, only ice, several feet thick. Sometimes the top of the ground would thaw; the resulting ice water, having no place to go, provided a cold bath for the laurel, myrtle, and ajuga from which they did not recover. Even the lilacs suffered. The knoll is now bare, except for two little locust trees on top.

Why should any woman in her right mind go on gardening under circumstances such as these? Why not take up numismatics or philately; why not learn Russian? Everybody is learning Russian these days. I, however, am not. I tried, but after several months I acknowledged I was licked. The Russian language is not for me. I gave up.

Not with gardening, however. Nobody gives that up. I sometimes wonder if it is not because of the pictures in the women's magazines. Colored pictures of gardens; a rose bed all a-bloom; a double border of perennials in June, with blue spires of delphinium and white madonna

lilies and pink something else and a few spots of yellow. Yummy! Hand me that catalogue. But as little Buttercup so aptly remarked, things aren't always what they seem. I know something about those magazine gardens from a woman whose garden was used for the pictures. You are writing a piece for the July issue about gardens; it is April and you have a few early daffodils but certainly no madonna lilies. What do you do? Why, you do nothing, but nurserymen spring into action. Trucks arrive with plants in burlap; beds are prepared; delphiniums in flower, lilies with heavy white heads, etcetera and etcetera, are set in place. The photographers follow hard on the nurserymen. Snap snap and it is done. Your garden will be preserved on shiny paper for posterity or at least long enough to persuade a lot of impressionable women that a garden is a good idea.

Not that we need much persuading. Nor do I think it is because of the rewarding moments. Gardeners always say, when their gardens are being looked at, of course the isphadistas were wonderful last week, or you must come back in July when the euralium is in bloom. Nevertheless, there are moments! There are some spring days in my own garden—or in one corner of it—when the violets are purple and white and the myrtle is blue, when the primulas, yellow and pink and red and cream-colored, are interspersed with forget-me-nots, when the fritillaria lifts its silly, spotted lanterns, and the chionodoxa is as blue as the sky—see, how people get to writing about gardens. It is really very pretty; or it was. Unfortunately

the primulas perished in that icy winter I referred to earlier, along with most of the violets, and I can't find the chionodoxa any more. I must attend to that corner—a few snowdrops and some species tulips maybe. . . . No, it is not for the good moments that gardeners go on gardening. I imagine it is plain stubbornness. I will not, I absolutely will not be worsted by a fritillary. I will show him, her, or it that I am as good as he is, even if I am bigger. After all, there will be another spring.

Indeed one of the few endearing attributes of the human race is its evident love of flowers. Take any whistle stop on any railroad—take it quick, while we have a few railroads left; the man who flags the train is not very busy, what with two trains up and two down every twenty-four hours. Naturally enough, he spends his spare time tending a flower bed. Whistle-stop flower beds are likely to contain the too-familiar magenta petunia, orange marigolds, and a nice border of red salvia, but what matter? The trainman does not know this is a combination frowned on by more sophisticated gardeners. He loves his flower bed and so do I. The reason I love to live in the downtown part of New York City called Greenwich Village is that every spring flower boxes blossom with red geraniums, bought from the flower man's wagon. On fire escapes in the Italian section there are pots of sweet basil growing. Any number of Villagers plant blue morning glories which send up half a dozen thin stems bearing half a dozen flowers, and their owners proudly twine them over the top of the window and fasten them with

string. The windows with sweet potatoes growing in a glass, the windows with great, sprawly avocadoes six feet tall, the barbershop window filled with begonia semper florens that really does bloom all the time—I love them all. I am told that uptown in the more elegant parts of town there are also flower boxes, very fancy ones with red geraniums and white petunias and ivy trailing down in front. I like the Village gardens better. There is, however, that wonderfully public-spirited woman, Mrs. Albert Lasker, who, as a memorial to her mother, I am told, causes to be planted every year thousands of flowers along Park Avenue, tulips in the spring, chrysanthemums in the fall. I cannot think of a prettier way to spend money. The human race is not lost as long as it plants flowers and tends them.

Yet there are two trends which worry me. One of them is old, one is new. Many years ago I made my first and only attempt to submit material for a contest in flower arranging. I took a large berry bowl, ruby thumbprint glass it was and beautiful in itself, and filled it with a melange of the flowers of early summer. The other container was a little early-American glass basket with a handle and a fluted edge. In this I put syringa and blue stems of Chinese delphinium and some white field daisies. I thought both my "arrangements" looked beautiful and so did my faithful Martha, who loved flowers and excessively admired my way of fixing them.

The judges of the contest didn't even look in the direction of my attempts. The glass basket was put back under

a shelf where it could not be seen unless you bent your knees almost to the floor. I did this but I imagine that nobody else did. The red berry dish was put in a corner behind a grandfather clock. The prizes went to three bare branches of something or other with two daffodils and a spread-eagled tulip at their base, and a tasteful do of iris decorated with a stuffed hummingbird. The iris leaves, of course, were wired.

Since then I have gone on arranging flowers to suit myself but I have not entered any more contests. I did, however, once go to a garden-club meeting where a visiting lady was giving advice on arrangements submitted to her for this purpose. One such was a jar of beautiful gladioli, strange colors of mahogany and purple and apricot. I am sure the woman who grew them loved them to distraction and I am also sure that she submitted the arrangement feeling sure she would be complimented on it just as it was. Nothing of the sort happened. Our teacher bent the stems of half of them, removed others, throwing them aside, and broke a few more. When she finished the arrangement to her satisfaction it had an upright section and another section at right angles to it. This, in fact, was the shape of all the arrangements after she had improved them. She liked right angles. But what if the owner of the gladioli did not? Well, it served her right, perhaps, for submitting her beautiful flowers to such torture.

I do not like flower stems to be wired. On the whole I prefer not to wear corsages, particularly orchids, which should be kept at home branching beautifully in a slender

vase; but corsages are given one on occasion and when I get home I remove all the rubbery plastic tape that the florist has wound around the stems of the poor flowers, gently extract the wire with which he has pierced the heart, and float the remains in a shallow dish. You would be surprised how long orchids last under this treatment. I believe you are supposed to keep orchids in the refrigerator, taking them out whenever you want to pin them on. But I do not like my flowers competing with the carton of milk and the bowl of leftover peas. I have a feeling they do not like life in the refrigerator any more than I should myself.

There is an old rule among flower arrangers in the know that your flowers should be once and a half as high as the container you put them in and they should exemplify the life principle or something, with a long vertical branch, a shorter branch to the left, and a still shorter one to the right. If I am wrong about this, please do not correct me. As to the first principle, it is nonsense. I have a flower arrangement in the living room right now which is perfectly beautiful; the flowers are about four times as high as the copper cup they stand in. They consist of the reddish-purple seed pods of physostegia, sprays of little blue asters, some big zinnias, all colors, and all the glads I had left, which is to say one yellow one, a rather wind-blown pink, and a red. At the bottom are a few clumps of rudbeckia, those black-eyed Susans of the fall. The thing to remember in fixing flowers is to have

points and rounds; also to give a feeling of looseness and naturalness by a space in the top center of your bunch.

I used to know a woman who picked a large bunch of miscellaneous flowers, thrust them in a milk bottle, and put in some water if she thought of it. This is not good. My daughter-in-law, however, who is an artist, does strange and wonderful things with flowers. I came into her house the other day and on the hall table were three green wine bottles of different sizes; in each was a spray of some herb, dried tarragon in one, rue in another, and so on. Water was not necessary. Since the table is pine painted a dull, thin red, the effect was charming. I used to pick flowers for her when she was coming up for the weekend and put them in a pitcher or vase in what is for me the usual way. She always thanked me, but by the next morning she would have done something to the vase, pulled out one flower or put in another, and it would look like her and not in the least like me. I never should have thought of what she did, but I always liked it.

Probably my distaste for the conventional arrangements in the flower shows is that they are so much alike—or so self-consciously "different"; moreover, they all, in my opinion, distort the nature of the flowers themselves. I don't think the flowers like it. Here I come to one of the secrets of gardening which old hands know very well, or if they don't it is one of the reasons they have trouble. The truth is that flowers have a life of their own; not just the life we know about, the seed sprouting, the bud form-

ing, the flower opening to form the seed pod once again. In one way, that is all a flowering plant wants to do: bloom, set seed, and die. You, as a gardener, constantly interfere with this process by cutting off the dead flowers and making the plant produce more. That is the physical life of the plant. There is also another life. Flowers are understandably vain; they like to be admired. If you make a practice of going out every morning and looking at all the plants, noting which are coming into bloom, which should be tied up or freed from weeds or what not—and how can you fail to do this?—if you do this, your flowers will bloom better. Flowers like to be looked at; they hate to be neglected or passed over.

I said earlier that there were two trends in the flower business which worried me, the first being "arrangements." The second—I almost hesitate to mention it—is the great array of artificial flowers which is at present blooming away in department stores and even in otherwise reputable flower shops. The daffodils are enormously lifelike, albeit a little too regular and too large; the glads are equally splendid and you do not have to pull off the bottom floret every morning because it has closed up. You can hardly tell one of these blooms from the real thing; unless, that is, you are unable to distinguish life with all its irresistible imperfections from death.

I am sounding very captious. I do not like artificial flowers. I do not like artificial-looking arrangements of flowers. I do not like the weather which menaces my gar-

den and undoes the work of months or sometimes years. I just like flowers. And I shall probably continue to grow them as long as I can carry a basket or push a trowel or wield a pair of scissors or pull a weed.

4

A Rose By Any Other Name . . .

It has happened! The smellies are upon us. By the time these words see print, it may be that all movies will be accompanied by smells: the smell of onions frying, of coffee boiling—boiling over, if you want to be really special; smells of new bread and of a buttery-handed child, of a wet Airedale who has just met a skunk, of a horse barn, of lilacs in the rain, of festering lilies, and of weeds. I was one of the misguided prophets who said the talkies would never come to anything, so I should not compound my error by predicting a dim future for the smellies. We have them, we shall have more of them, we shall not be able to escape them. Since they can be hooked up with the air-conditioning of a theater, it is perfectly possible that we can see a TV western in the privacy of our own homes and accompany it, by means of our personal air con-

ditioner, with a good ole hoss smell or the perfume used by the lady gambler, probably Jockey Club.

The first movie accompanied by smells was a travelogue about China; the first scent to greet the audience's collective nose was that of a cut orange. They were dumbfounded to discover that it smelled just like a cut orange. Later on in the picture a tiger appeared on the screen; it smelled like a tiger, or so the program said. I can't say I have ever smelled a tiger myself; neither have I ever smelled a Hong Kong restaurant alongside a river. There were irreverent souls at the movie-with-smells who said the restaurant, the tiger, and others of the Chinese smells reminded them of soy sauce. For all I know, a tiger does smell of soy sauce. Perhaps he uses it to season his meal. Let us say that a Chinese movie smells like soy; an Italian movie would of course smell of spaghetti with meat sauce; an Indian movie might smell like ghee, which is some sort of butter, I believe; a Spanish movie would be redolent of olive oil and garlic. I don't know about an American movie; Coca-Cola doesn't smell; but of course, hamburgers with ketchup and onion! A French movie would be delicately reminiscent of Chanel #5. Or if you prefer, My Sin.

All this is in the interest of reality. It is not enough to see a picture of a tiger; you must hear something which sounds like his roar; you must smell something that makes you think of tigers, of the last tiger you saw in the zoo, restlessly pacing his cage on a hot day. Of course it may be that tigers in the jungle and tigers in the zoo do not

smell alike. A cat that has walked through a summer meadow smells of hay; that Airedale referred to above does not, thank goodness, smell like all Airedales. A tiger which has just killed might reek of blood; a tigress playing with her cubs in the hot sunshine—well, this is not going to be easy. There are smells and smells, and if you have a cold in the head you will just smell Mentholatum; but with a cold in the head you are better off home in bed anyway. Don't turn on the television set though. It might smell.

I am wondering how far the search for reality is going to take us. We have the sound of the thunder; we shall presently experience the fresh, sharp smell of summer rain; but why not go the whole way? Why not showers coming down from the ceiling of the movie house, although a thoughtful management will doubtless supply umbrellas and rubbers. Why should we have a picture of a tiger, with or without roars and scents? Would it not be more realistic to have a tiger in the flesh, one that we could feel as well as see? A stuffed tiger would hardly do. We could feel it, but somehow it would not be real; not really real. A tiger is a wild beast, one to inspire fear in the beholder. You can't be afraid of a tiger on a motion-picture screen, even if he jumps at you. Pooh, you say, it's only Cinerama.

If you want reality, don't take photographs; don't fool around with the air-conditioning; don't play records on a sound track. Take your audience to Hong Kong. There

is nothing quite like it. No representation, however realistic, will exactly reproduce the real thing.

This is quixotic, you say. Obviously you can't go to Hong Kong just to see a Chinese travelogue. Go to the zoo then, and look at a tiger. I promise you it will be more real than any picture, it will sound more fearsome than any sound track, if it should happen to roar; and if you can get close enough, it will very likely not smell of soy.

What we have been struggling with, of course, is the distinction between life and art. Our movie-with-smells makers are trying to convince us that they are the same thing. You are seeing a movie about Hong Kong; very well, it will be Hong Kong, except that you will get there for a dollar or so instead of having to buy a costly airplane ticket. You will see a tiger on the screen; it will sound and smell just like a tiger. In time we shall make it even more real, somehow we shall, because after all we must be realistic and that means Just Like Life.

The catch is in the word *like*. Just like life is not life. It is art pretending to be life; at best, this is often better because more selective, more dramatic, more poignant than life. To be really lifelike, your movie would be tedious, hours long, repetitious, slow. When you cut it and shape it, eliminate the scenes that did not come off—although the camera reproduced them faithfully, they really happened—shorten it to make it endurable, point up the drama and play down the tedium; when you do this you are improving on life; you are creating a work of art. Let it smell if you must, but you may not have to; if

it is good enough, the scene with your tiger will be so real that you can turn off the air-conditioning. The audience will know the tiger is there.

For years a quatrain of verse has moved me greatly. After innumerable repetitions, I can usually say it without a catch in my throat. It is by A. E. Housman:

> Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
> Is hung with bloom along the bough;
> And stands about the woodland ride
> Wearing white for Eastertide.*

In reading these four simple but magical lines I do not need (a) to see a cherry tree in bloom, (b) to see crosses with purple ribbon and white lilies signifying Easter, or (c) to smell fruit blossoms, which don't have much smell anyway. I don't even have to know what a woodland ride is, although I have a vague idea. The words themselves create the image and my mind does the rest. Take a more complicated set of lines, from *Macbeth.* Macbeth says:

> My way of life
> Is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf,
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have, but in their stead

* From *A Shropshire Lad* by A. E. Housman. By permission of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. Also by permission of the Society of Authors, London, as the literary representative of the Trustees of the Estate of the late A. E. Housman, and Messrs. Jonathan Cape, Ltd., publishers of A. E. Housman's *Collected Poems.*

Curses, not loud but deep, mouth honor, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny and dare not.

Here is an experience which is understandable if not, happily, common to us all: a poor man who, in old age, finds that for whatever reason he is without honor or love, but has only make-believe respect, simulated affection which he would like to deny but does not dare (or which his "friends" would like to refuse but are afraid to). Would this statement be more graphic if the line about "the sere, the yellow leaf" were accompanied by a color photograph of trees in autumn; would we understand it better if we saw actors representing false courtiers pretending to bestow homage, if we heard the words they did not mean spoken in an aside—and so on? My answer is that everything is in Shakespeare's words, all that the scene can possibly evoke is there. Since *Macbeth* is a play, we hear the words spoken by actors, but spoken or not, because they were written by a great poet, the words make a picture, a picture in the mind of the hearer. No other picture is really necessary.

Everybody is not Shakespeare, you say. Of course not. But in so far as every writer is an artist, he must by his words communicate to his hearers. A play communicates a picture as does a movie. We have learned—I have learned in spite of my earlier doubts—that, as in a play, a movie communicates better if the characters speak; although Walt Disney's *Beaver Valley* communicates pretty well with no words spoken. Sometimes sound effects, if

they are not too obviously contrived, may help, although the thwack that accompanies a blow, the bellows sigh that goes with a love scene, even the roar of that tiger in the jungle do not help much if the rest of the scene is not convincing. It is the talk or the arrangement of pictures that makes the work of art real. You see a man on a screen cutting an orange; you smell cut orange. A pleasant trick but nothing to do with art; just a picture of a man cutting an orange. A succession of images of men cutting oranges would be a deadly bore. I am afraid that a succession of smells, more or less related to what you are seeing on the screen, will turn out to be a bore also. I say this in the full realization that I am sticking my neck out and maybe the smellies, succeeded by the feelies, will be the great artistic success of the twenty-first century.

There is, of course, one further advance that we can make in the interest of realism. We can have no play at all, nothing but documentaries, actual documentaries, not made-up ones. Thus Eliza, crossing the ice, will be fleeing from a really deadly pursuer, and she will be hopping from ice floe to ice floe with ice-cold water lapping her ankles; she will be carrying a flesh-and-blood baby (if it is absolutely real, it should be her own baby); we shall hear its cries, not on a record either. If you have ever ventured to cross a frozen brook with perhaps a foot of water underneath the slippery ice, you know how near you are to getting wet feet; but our Eliza is crossing the river; if she falls in, as she is all too likely to do, she may drown.

But pshaw, this is nonsense. A valuable property cannot risk its neck on an ice floe. So we put white painted blocks in a tank, roil the water with paddles, and let the dear girl, carrying a doll, leap across here and there. It looks like life, doesn't it? Aren't you frightened for her? If you are frightened, by some paradox, it isn't life; it is art.

As I write, the Christmas season is almost here. I am reminded inevitably of the greatest of all stories, told in the simplest of words: "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

Because there was no room for them in the inn. Do we need a picture of a landlord shaking his head at the inn door, perhaps gesticulating, pointing scornfully to the stable, saying, "That's all the room we have left"? Do we need to hear the stamp of horses' feet in the inn courtyard, the neighing of donkeys, the cries of stable boys? Do we need any smells?

We do not need any of these visual or audial or olfactory aids because the words themselves are so powerful that for two thousand years they have moved a large portion of mankind.

I emphasize words because words are the most important means of communicating not only thought but feeling. However, much the same thing applies to painting. Rembrandt's great painting of the old woman trimming her nails would not be a bit better if she suddenly turned

her head and nodded at you, if you could hear the click of the scissors, if you could smell her dinner cooking. The Winged Victory of Samothrace is real because she is not moving; because she merely looks as though any moment she might fly. The beholder must supply the motion, he must do the work. The sculptor has put into his mind the notion of flying; it is the heart which is lifted up, not the marble statue.

I remember reading that a tribe of primitive men in Africa were shown movies of elephants; these were animals with which the people were perfectly familiar. They did not recognize them. They did not know about pictures of elephants. They did not know about pictures. In this respect, they knew only life; they had no experience of art. If an elephant had walked into the tent in which the pictures were being shown, they would of course have known what it was. This flat picture in black and white on a flat screen, that they did not know about. Knowing only life, they needed the sounds, the smells, the feel, the whole familiar scene in order to recognize any part of it. We are not primitive people. We know all about pictures, just as we know about descriptions in words of events which have taken place or which might take place. The more they are shaped and contrived by a creator, the more we shall be moved by them, the more recognizable they will seem to us. The more they are just like life, the closer they will be to the daily newspaper. We read it, we are instructed by it, we are sometimes

bored, we occasionally marvel. We do not quite class it as entertainment.

It does, however, turn our fingers black; and when it is fresh off the press, it does smell. Of ink.

5

I Know What I Like

Once about forty years ago I ate a large helping of rice pudding. It was given me by the mother of a classmate of mine with whom I was spending the night. This lady, my classmate's mother, was every inch a *Grande Dame*. She said to me, "I know young people like dessert," and she heaped my plate with dessert, all of which I ate to the last drop. I was much too afraid of her to tell her the truth, that I loathed every mouthful. My classmate, her daughter, who was well acquainted with my distaste for rice pudding, not only did not come to my rescue, she watched me dispose of the nasty stuff with secret, strangling laughter.

It must have been the second time in my life that I ate rice pudding. I suppose there was a first time, when I was very young and didn't know any better; but after that I

did know. Except for the one time mentioned above and that first time I have never eaten rice pudding in my life, nor do I intend to.

I hear people comparing notes on the different kinds of rice pudding they dote on most. One likes it with plain milk and raisins; poor man's rice pudding, I believe it is called. Poor man, indeed. Someone else is partial to custard; some like it thick, some thin.

I hate it in every possible form.

It is not that I object to pudding. I like apple tapioca, the thick round tapioca that has to be soaked ahead of time. Probably you can't buy it any more in these days of precooking. It is good with thick cream. I like plum pudding pretty well, especially the hard sauce. Except for the calories it manifestly contains, I could eat Indian pudding twice a week, corn meal, molasses, whipped cream, and all. But rice pudding, no. It is very simple; I do not like sweet rice. Rice with chicken gravy is excellent, even better than Mexican rice with green peppers and tomatoes. Plain boiled rice with butter and pepper and salt is as good as a baked potato.

Don't, however, ask me to eat rice pudding. Don't ask me to eat white turnips, either. They are to me bitter, watery, and sour. While you are about it, don't pass me the sauerkraut. I like raw cabbage; new cabbage, cooked till it is still crisp but not limp—that is good, too. Dead and decomposing cabbage, in other words sauerkraut, for this please include me out. I have never eaten tripe and I don't plan to start now.

Beyond these few items, there is practically no food that I find distasteful. I love parsnips. I can't get up much enthusiasm for snails, but the garlic sauce is so good that the little bits of rubber can be eaten with it. All meat except for the fat, all fruit even persimmons, all vegetables with the exceptions cited earlier—I like every one. When I was past forty I learned to drink buttermilk, happily.

I am really very easy to please and there is hardly a country in which, given the national dish, I should prefer to starve. (Well, I'm not sure about the lamb's eyes and entrails served up as delicacies by Arab hosts.) These idiosyncrasies of taste are not, of course, peculiar to me. My nephew considers beets an abomination; beets, that simple little vegetable without much taste to speak of except the taste of sugar. He finds beets revolting. A friend of ours has to leave the house if onions are being cooked. Not only is he unable to eat them, even the merest whiff of an onion sends him outdoors. Also, lamb gives him spots. Lamb and onions, two wonderful foods; indeed, onions are pretty nearly the indispensable food. Yet here is this poor man who can't eat either one; and his poor wife has to cook without them. My oldest friend was raised by a strict grandmother on a tiny budget. They often had lamb stew because it was cheap; but it was so cheap it was mostly fat and bones. My friend for years detested all stew as a result, and I could coax her to try it only by showing her the tender chunks of beef with almost no fat, the carrots from the garden, the clove of garlic with which, in beef drippings, the meat is browned,

the fresh parsley, the bit of red wine—no bones, no fat, just a plain beef stew, a dish without parallel, especially on a raw, wet November day, accompanied by hot French bread and a green salad.

I mentioned parsnips. I like them fried in butter or creamed; it is surprising how many people heartily dislike them. They are too sweet; but they are no sweeter than beets or carrots. They are stringy; but not if they are cooked just enough. They have a funny taste; but so do shrimps, if you come to think of it, and green olives and sour cream. Some poor souls actually dislike cheese, and for them I feel the tenderest of pity. To dislike cheese—it hardly bears thinking of.

How shall we account for these differences of taste among people raised on more or less the same sort of diet? Why should one palate reject beets and another balk at parsnips? I am sure it is not owing to some divine dispensation which makes sure the supply of beets or parsnips is adequate to the demand. It may be that taste buds differ from person to person. Even if your family ate beets once a week while you were growing up, even if lovely rice pudding was offered you periodically all your life long, something in your physical make-up might violently reject either as food.

I sometimes think that taste is the most complicated of the senses. Hearing, without which we are bereft indeed, is perhaps separate and single; but taste, smell, touch, and even sight are closely intertwined. We are told that blindfolded and with a clothespin over your nose, you cannot

tell the difference between a bit of apple and a bit of onion. We all know that food should look appetizing in addition to tasting good. When my sons were in college they said one of the most disagreeable meals of a rather dull diet was all white: creamed chicken, mashed potatoes, and cauliflower. None of it tasted bad, but it didn't look good. The three white foods were an appetite killer. Although I have no objection to beets, I rather dislike them with tomatoes in a salad—the blue-red and the yellow-red clash with one another; but tomatoes, cucumbers, and green peppers are made to go together, in looks as well as taste.

I am sure that the elaborate concoctions of the pre-refrigerator days in great households—the towering pies, the spun-sugar confections, the pastries that looked like cathedrals—were intended to disguise the frequently gamey taste of the contents; spice your meat up very hot and pungent and make it look astonishingly like anything but food and your diners will hardly notice that it has lain too long in the sun.

Surely fruit tastes better because it looks so beautiful; and the vegetable man who plays the hose over his wares, leaving them fresh and dripping, must sell them quicker than the man who lets his lettuce wilt and his beet and carrot tops get limp and yellow. Fruit feels good in the hand, too; the waxy firmness of an apple, the delicate, silky smoothness of a plum, the shivering roughness of a peach, the silver bloom of a grape, and the orange, its rough skin smelling so pungently oily.

Yet involved as taste is with most of the other senses, it is still not clear why perfectly ordinary food is so distasteful—or so alluring. When I was a child there were two food carts drawn each by an old horse that went up and down the streets in which I played. One of them sold waffles for a penny each, hot waffles with a shake of powdered sugar. No waffles I have tasted since were as good as those, although unfortunately I ate them only once or twice in my life. Perhaps it was that they were forbidden —my mother thought them unsanitary—and the few times I enjoyed them I did so surreptitiously; perhaps it was the old horse—I can see him now, a straw hat perched on his venerable white head, his long ears sticking out of it, and a pink paper rose thrust in the buckle of his headband. I remember the horse better than the driver, but it seems to me the man wore a gray sweater with a hole in the elbow. The cart had once been blue but most of the paint had worn off; there was a little house at the back of it with a charcoal fire in it to cook the waffles by, and a great bowl of batter, rather slopped over; the man's hand, when he reached for the penny, was not, although I hate to admit it, really clean. Yet the waffles were so hot and so crisp, so sugary and so waffley tasting that all waffles since have been an anticlimax, even when our old Martha used to make them in the cast-iron waffle iron on our wood stove, better far than any electric contraption. Another taste is part of my youth, the other cart, also with an old horse, only this time I don't remember what color he was. This was the cart from which you could

buy snowballs; rounds of shaved ice on a piece of paper, over which a dash of colored syrup had been squirted from a glass bottle with a metal cap. You sucked up the ice and the syrup, green, yellow, or red, and it was nectar. I am sure it was, although I never actually tasted it. My mother really put her foot down about the snowballs; I must not, I absolutely must not buy one. I was a timid child, inclined to obedience, so I did not. My father came home one night shortly after the snowballs were forbidden, with a gadget that shaved ice into a round ball; my mother had purchased some strawberry syrup, uninvitingly wholesome; together they made me a snowball and put it in a plate, to be eaten with a spoon. Alas, as any child in the world would know, it was not the same. I ate it dutifully and never mentioned snowballs again. My parents loved me dearly and they would not have hurt or disappointed me for anything; they simply did not understand about snowballs. And snowballs, untasted, remain for me the supreme taste.

I am perfectly willing to believe that somewhere in my past, buried under layers of the unconscious, lies an experience with rice pudding, some awful moment that I have entirely forgotten except that I remember the symbol of it, and the symbol I cannot abide. So with beets; what could a beet do to a little boy that would make a grown man hate beets? Nobody knows, of course. Our friend who cannot endure onions was found, at the age of four, crying on the back steps; his mother, it seems, was peeling onions in the kitchen. Now it is true that for some

years when he was small he would not take a bite of food unless his mother was looking at him, so somehow a mother's undivided attention and an onion may well be inextricably mixed. Perhaps if we had all been psychoanalyzed—but if we had, not only the secrets of the rice pudding and the beets might have come out, although of course they might not, but other less innocent idiosyncrasies. I am inclined to believe that it is better to let well enough alone. Why should everybody eat beets? Why should everyone like rice pudding? As the man said about spinach: "I'm glad I don't like it because if I did I'd eat it and I hate the damn stuff."

What seems clear is that taste, that complicated sense all mixed up with sight and touch and smell, is also involved with our general behavior, our memory, our nonmemory, our own mysterious past. My own children have their particular distastes, one for lima beans or anything dry and mouth-filling like lima beans, one for brussels sprouts and in general the cabbage family; their father hates what he calls slippery desserts that are easy to eat. I should not go as far as the mother of a woman we know who regularly served five vegetables at every meal because there were five members of the family and none of them liked what any of the others did. But within reason, I believe taste differences should be honored. I refrain from using onions as a seasoning when one friend dines with us; I eschew beets for another. As for me, when I am asked to dine and my bête noire appears as a dessert dish, I politely decline; if I am pressed, I say that the dinner

was so delicious I simply have no room for dessert; if my hostess foolishly persists—but so far nobody has, so that I have never had to say, right out in public, what I really think about rice pudding.

6

Sins of Omission

A FRIEND of mine died the other day. She was not a close friend; actually, when I was an undergraduate she was the Secretary of the College, and as such we were on those terms which different generations offer to each other: polite and respectful on my part, tolerant and amused on hers, since I was an innocent of innocents and at the same time inclined to mischief. I liked her very much, however, and I believe she liked me; but I never saw her again after I left college, some forty years ago. I never knew what had happened to her until two or three years back, and then I learned that, at nearly eighty, she was very gallantly and slowly dying of cancer.

I wrote her and she answered from the nursing home she was living in up in Maine. She had worked for the Red Cross after leaving her college job, she had built her own

little house in the woods with the help of her cocker spaniel, whose picture she enclosed. She loved to feed the birds but the squirrels ran off with the food first—and so on. We had, it seemed, many things in common, and I wrote her about our birds and our squirrels, including our white one. We had a pleasant correspondence, maybe three or four letters a year. I was a little slow about answering, slower then she was, indeed. Her last letter reached me—I am ashamed to admit it—almost six months ago. I had lots of things to occupy me, or so I thought; we moved out of the city, our last move in this life; we took a trip to the Middle West; we had visiting grandchildren. I truly meant to reply to her last letter; any day, I told myself, I would do it.

She could not wait. She died about a week ago.

It would have been so easy to take the half hour I needed to write a letter. She would have been delighted to read the bits of news I could have given her. She had not too many correspondents; one of them was my classmate and old friend, a more faithful correspondent than I. Alas, for my sins of omission. I have committed so many of them.

Something happens to one of my friends, something pleasant like receiving a modest honor or getting a new grandchild or publishing an article—not a big something, but a little one. My impulse is exactly right: I will write a note, I will send flowers, I will telephone, even if it is long distance.

About half the time I yield to this happy notion. The

rest of the time I do not. I dillydally around, I think I will do it tomorrow, I forget. After a while it is too late. It is a pity that my friends do not know me for the really nice person I could be if I ever got around to it.

My husband is better in this respect than I am. He is prompt to answer letters, he makes the phone calls, he sends the wires. After we have visited friends, he writes his thanks the next day; inspired by this, I usually do it too, but he thinks of it first. There are times when I make the grade. One of them was the Christmas my mother died. We had all ridden up to see her in Connecticut a couple of days before the holiday. She had given me money for the children's Christmas out of her small store, I had duly spent it, and my sons were grateful. On Christmas night I said, "Sit down now and write Grandma; tell her how much you liked her presents." They did so and mailed the letters. Perhaps the mails were faster then, for we heard that the letters arrived the next morning and my mother got them with her breakfast tray. That night she died. I have always been grateful for my impulse; I have always been grateful to my sons for acting on it without protest.

It would not really have mattered. She would have loved her grandsons just as dearly without a letter of thanks; but I am glad the letters came, I am glad she got to read them.

Brides present the greatest variety in writing letters of thanks. Some of them seem to acknowledge gifts immediately. How sweetly they must sleep at night. One girl

took the prize in this respect. Early one week I ordered a present for her, to be sent to our Connecticut town. When I came up Friday for the weekend, I found her note of thanks waiting for me. The department store contributed nicely to this small triumph, but the girl was almost incredibly prompt. Some brides, I am told, wait for six months to acknowledge wedding gifts. Several years ago a bride and groom came to live in our town. All winter the living-room door of the cottage they occupied was blocked by piles of boxes. I could not resist inquiring what they might contain. "Oh," said the young wife cheerfully, "these are wedding presents. I can't put them away because I haven't written the thank-you notes yet. If I do, I'll forget." It seemed to me that she must have already forgotten, because by spring I could not see that the pile had diminished a bit. At least it did not seem to bother her. If I had been so dilatory, I should at least have lain awake now and then and should have found it simpler to do my duty and have done with it.

It is always simpler to do one's duty. This fact being well known to everybody including myself, I wonder why I so often fail to do it. If duty seems a pretentious word to use in connection with a gift of flowers or a short note, let us forget duty. Let us call it pleasure; why do I deny myself the pleasure of making a small gesture which I know will be appreciated; I know this because I appreciate it so much when I am on the receiving end.

I emphasize the idea of the small gesture because in a big crisis I usually come through with all flags flying. If

you have twins you will be sure to get a note from me. If your house is blown down by a hurricane, I shall be there, bringing eggs and bacon and clean underwear. In a minor calamity I will send you my love, but there is an even chance you will never know it; it will not burden the mails or travel along the wires. I shall be thinking of you but I shall not tell you so.

There are, of course, some people who do not like to be written to, or thanked, or given presents. We knew one of this sort years ago. He had been lavishly generous to my husband, visiting in a city away from home. Like a Maecenas, he had showered dinners, wine, and gifts upon the guest's increasingly embarrassed head. When my husband was about to depart, he bought a book, a modest present costing perhaps three dollars, and presented it to his lavish friend. Maecenas flushed, turned away, seemed almost angry, stammered incoherent thanks. It was not that he was overcome by the gift; he didn't like gifts, for himself. He just liked to give them.

This is as ungenerous as not giving. It is as necessary to accept praise as to bestow it, and to accept it courteously. There are people who can neither praise nor be praised. The tradition in New England, where we now live, is that "praise to the face is open disgrace." Once when my husband was speaking in Richmond, Virginia, he referred to the indescribably effusive enthusiasm of his hosts. Such politeness, he said, such delight, such bird-tones of admiration from the women, only exceeded by the rolling periods of the men. He loved it but he could not match it.

It reminded him of the story about the Maine woman who died after a long, full, helpful life; she had been a devoted wife and mother, a generous neighbor, a public-spirited citizen, in short as near a perfect specimen as a female can be. On her gravestone they wanted to refer to this perfection in a suitable way. The carving on the stone said: "Here lies Mary Smith. She averaged well for these parts."

This is not exactly fulsome praise. We ought to do better than that. Perhaps in her lifetime Mary Smith could have received more of the letters I neglect to send. I am sure she did not get enough. What interests me is why. Why do I—since I began with my own omissions, I can decently end with them—why do I procrastinate until it is too late? Is it because to write is too much trouble? I do not think so. Because I haven't the time? Of course not. I think of Abigail Adams, the wife of John Adams, who, when he was Minister to France, brought up five children, managed the farm, rose at five to distribute the supplies to the house servants, oversaw everything, and when supper was done and the household quiet sat down and wrote a long letter to her spouse in Paris, afterward making a fair copy which she put in the mail. Perhaps she did not write every night; that she wrote at all is a sort of miracle and there is a large bundle of letters, long letters, to show that she wrote often. No, it is not for lack of time. It is not for lack of desire, either. I really want to make the generous gesture; I am genuinely happy when I have made it.

My psychoanalyst, if I ever got around to one, would probably say it was because I really didn't want to, or because of an obtrusive father image or a nagging death wish. In those muddy depths of the subconscious, who knows what monsters lurk? I, for one, do not intend to find out. I prefer to think it is because I tend to do what I must do today. It has rained, so I do the weeding I have been putting off for a week. I am going to the city for a couple of months, so I hastily give a dinner party that I should have given weeks ago. (I may note in passing that before we do leave for the city, we are usually showered with invitations, so perhaps I am not the only one.) I cook because it is mealtime; when the children come for the weekend, I cook something special. My dear husband is tolerant of whatever I give him in the way of food. I mend my torn hem when I wear the skirt again—or I don't wear it because I haven't remembered to sew the hem.

If I were only a better woman! But of course this is what the human creature is, what makes him different from other creatures. I am sure that our Blackie does not want to be a better cat than he is. If he thinks about it at all, he is convinced that he is a wonderful cat; no, rather he thinks all cats are wonderful, or perhaps all cats are just cats. But man has that nagging desire to be different, to change his state, to be richer or more skillful or more learned, to love more, be more considerate of others, more charitable to their faults and more attentive to his own.

This is in all our literature from the Bible down. No

man is truly just or truly wise, no man loves with all his heart; no man is without sin among us. This is probably why we envision a God who is all wise, all knowing, all powerful. Blackie, I think, does not know about God. But he has his own minor rituals. No matter how hungry he is, and he is always hungry, he will forego breakfast to sit with me while I take my morning bath. When I begin to dress, he feels it is necessary to wait no longer; he dashes downstairs and winds around the feet of my husband, who is cutting up his beef kidney. But for a few minutes he pays heed to more spiritual matters; he wants, for some reason, to be with me.

I have a feeling that if Blackie could write, he would not neglect the letter of condolence; he would always remember to send flowers.

7

A Living Wage

THE other day somebody gave me an article by an economist-statistician which set forth the value in hourly wages of the work done by wives. So much an hour for baby-tending; so much for cleaning the house; so much for washing and for marketing, for sewing on the family buttons, for cooking three meals a day, and so on. A number of things were left out of the list: for instance, I don't recall any stipend indicated for the time the little woman spends giving herself a home permanent so that she can be a more attractive wife, or for wrapping Christmas and birthday gifts for everybody, not to mention buying them in the first place, or for counting the laundry or tying up the old newspapers for the Boy Scouts to collect or making up fresh beds for guests—all of these being things that the hired help would not condescend to do, provided there was any hired help.

The author of the article on the wages of wives had worked it out very systematically, calculating the hours spent at each task, the going rate per hour, and adding it up to a tidy sum at the end of the week, something like $149.74 if I remember correctly, which of course Father doesn't have to pay because Mother doesn't work for wages, not by the hour or otherwise.

I don't know of any wife who demands wages for the hours she spends at her end of the family seesaw. Any more than I know a husband who pays himself wages for putting a new washer on the bathtub faucet or cutting wood for the fireplace or taking the kids to the movies on Saturday afternoon so Mama can have a little nap. Of course it is fun to add up all the money that would be owing you if as a wife or husband you were going to be paid for your time at regular hourly rates—at the rates the husband would pay for a housekeeper or nurse or the wife for a handyman or companion for her children. A wife who can tell herself that she is really worth six hundred dollars a month to her husband or is saving him $7,500 a year by her labor should advance considerably in her own esteem. A husband who can calculate that he is housing an employee worth that much money can consider himself an employer worth noticing.

I don't recall that the article cited above said anything about overtime, but perhaps it is just as well to forget that. The first thing you know Mama will have to be paying for her board and clothes. If the price of a wife were too high, no young man could afford to get married, and

if a young woman got grandiose ideas about her worth, she might not agree to love and cherish for better and for worse; not for less than a dollar seventy-five an hour anyway.

Of course the economist-statistician was only playing with figures. He knew perfectly well that wives do not get paid in money, no matter how many hours they put in each week at an endless variety of tasks. Most of the time they do their chores cheerfully—well, fairly cheerfully—although sometimes things seem to pile up. But even when wages are not paid, it works out well enough in the end. As for instance, during a recent holiday season when I discovered that if you begin a week with the makings of a bad cold which gets progressively worse as the days wear on, and if you have a certain number of meals to cook and clear away and beds to make and rooms to keep in order and what not, after a while—certainly by the time the guests are ready to leave—the cold is much better, either because of all the different cold remedies you tried or simply with the passage of time.

So wives don't get paid wages. Away with the thought. Only an economist-statistician who had nothing better to do would come up with such a foolish notion.

Yet I know of any number of families in which the boys are paid to mow the lawn, the girls to dust and clean up their rooms, and both sexes are rewarded with regular wages if they act as baby sitters for their little brother or sister.

Not, however, in our family. In our family everybody

had chores to do. Sometimes he did them with alacrity and good temper; sometimes he had to be coaxed or hounded into doing them. But he never got paid for them. My husband and I considered that the business of living as a family, which involved all sorts of tasks, was a communal enterprise. I had my duties, he had his; our children had theirs.

This, I am aware, is an old-fashioned notion. As outmoded as the older and more old-fashioned notion that an elderly aunt or grandparent will, as a matter of course, continue to live with the younger members of the family. We don't do that any more. We try to keep the generations separate; we try so hard that Grandma is by now convinced that she wants her own little place so as not to bother the children, no matter how lonely it makes her. On the whole, this separation of age groups is probably a good idea if you don't overdo it. I have known young mothers who found that a grandmother who lived in could function capably as a built-in baby sitter. Yet generations differ in their methods of bringing up children. An opinionated grandmother can make trouble; an insecure young mother can be afraid to take advice even if it is good. But whether Grandma lives in, lives around the corner, or has moved to California, on the occasions, rare or often, when she baby sits, does she ever get paid?

I cannot recall a single instance of this. Yet it would seem only fair, if the fifteen-year-old sister is paid to stay with little Henry, for Grandma to get her five dollars, too, for a tray supper, a long evening, and no entertainment

but a mystery magazine and a couple of Westerns on the TV; even if little Henry does not wake up and require six drinks of water and three trips to the bathroom.

Imagine a scene in the life of the family. The characters are Grandma, who is visiting the young folks, Mother, who has to live there whether she likes it or not, Evaline, fifteen and a half and wishing she were older, Mortimer, thirteen and big for his age, and little Henry, five and something of a trial. The scene opens in the family kitchen just after breakfast on a morning in summer.

Mother: Mortimer, are you going to get at that lawn today? It's beginning to look like a hayfield.

Mortimer: Sure, Ma, but let me remind you that so far I haven't been paid for the last time. His Nibs was short of cash. So that'll be double if I do it today. O.K., Ma?

Mother (sighing): O.K., I suppose. Now you, Evaline, please tidy up your room and do you mind emptying the ash trays in the living room?

Evaline (sweetly): Of course not, Mother. It ought to take me about two hours, and that'll be a dollar at my current rate of wages, although to tell you the truth I think maybe seventy-five cents an hour would be fairer.

Grandma: Are you still planning to play canasta tonight with the Severinghams? I don't care much for canasta myself and of course I can baby sit if you want me to.

Mother: That would be lovely, Grandma.

Evaline: Mother! You promised me I could stay with Henry tonight! I had it all planned and besides I need

the two fifty. Of course, if Grandma wanted to take over when Marjorie comes for me, we could walk down to the drugstore for a soda. That wouldn't matter, would it?

Grandma (fixing her with a steely eye): Not in the least, darling. We'll just consider it time out, and I'll collect for it.

Evaline: Grandma! You don't get paid for baby-sitting, do you?

Grandma: I'm sure I don't see why not. I'd just as soon push the power mower around, too. After all, I'm only sixty-six and in my full health and vigor for that age. I can use fifty cents an hour as well as the next one. Even better.

Mother: Now here's that skirt and blouse you wanted me to iron for you, Evaline. That'll be a dollar fifty, which is what I would pay a laundress if I had a laundress.

All: Mother! Daughter! What is the world coming to? And who is going to pay?

Who, indeed? Will it be Father? But he has already put in a bill for $5.50 for that small plumbing job he did yesterday. This, he explains, is the going rate for plumbers, and since he did it without a helper, not being a member of the union, it is really a bargain. It took him a little less than an hour, but as we all know plumbers do not accept pay for fractions.

I do not know what the outcome of this controversy will be. I suspect that Grandma, Mother, and Father will put in their bills in vain; but I am sure that Evaline and

Mortimer will be paid, and Henry, sweet little man, is already collecting ten cents a week for bringing in the morning paper and putting it beside Father's plate at the breakfast table.

Moreover, this procedure is so much standard practice in so many families that I hesitate to take exception to it. Maybe it is all right. We know that Mother doesn't get paid for her work because she does it out of love and because somebody has to do it; the very idea of pay in her case is absurd, as it is in Father's. He, after all, would be paying himself, the very epitome of absurdity. As for Grandma, she is getting free board and room and she wants to be of service; if she can't make herself useful the children may very well ask her to return to that furnished room that is so cold in winter. Hot in summer, too.

But what of Evaline and Mortimer? They are getting free room and board, too, and their clothes and books and ice skates and a guitar and a TV set of their own in the family room and money for movies once or twice a week and hot dogs for a dozen young friends on Saturday evening and other things too numerous to mention. Everything, indeed, that they ask for if their parents can possibly manage it. They also get an allowance—a dollar a week for Mortimer, one twenty-five for Evaline, although she doesn't think it enough. And little Henry is coming up the same way, only waiting for the day when he will be tall enough to push the lawn mower, for a consideration.

It would seem only logical, if Evaline and Mortimer are to receive cash remuneration for their efforts, that their

mother, too, should be paid a regular weekly wage, since after all she works day in and day out, holidays and Sundays, midnight, if necessary, and noon. Evaline is now fifteen; when she is twenty-five, should she still be living with her parents, will she then be paid for making her bed? Silly? But at what age will she cease being a paid employee in her own home? Sixteen? Eighteen? Twenty-one? At what age will Mortimer cut the grass because it needs cutting and he, as well as the other members of the family, likes to see the lawn short and smooth? How old will he be before he washes the family car for love and not for money? We know the answer to that; he will be old enough to drive it and will wash it to please himself.

I should be inclined to say that I did not like this family very much, including especially Evaline and Mortimer, if so many other families, among them some that I love dearly, did not operate in the same way. Yet I cannot help thinking that somewhere a cog has slipped a little. When Evaline has the grippe and her mother acts as nurse, no one thinks of pay. When her mother has the grippe, Evaline will carry trays to her without putting in a bill, and will even act as cook and housekeeper for her father and brothers, all for nothing. Why? Because she is a member of a family, because they live together, because there are things to be done.

If this is true in an emergency, it is also true every day of the year, for every task that has to be done, and that Evaline, when she is not doing her homework, has time to do. I suppose, however, it is too late for Evaline. Little

Henry is a different proposition. I suggest that next year he be given an allowance whether he brings in the paper or not, but that bringing in the paper is understood to be his job, not to mention feeding the cat and putting out the empty milk bottles. Just for fun, just to help, to do his share as a big boy and a member of the family in good standing.

It might work. In my opinion it is certainly worth trying.

8

What Kind of House Do You Want?

THE dining room is coming back. At the same time, the one-room house is going out. I could not be happier about both of these developments.

Everybody will remember the conference in Washington of a group of women with a representation of architects. The women were asked what sort of house they preferred, and they were not in the least bashful about giving their specifications.

They did not want all living to be done in one wall-enclosed space, with half-walls to divide the bedroom from the parlor. This had been the plaything of the more advanced house designers for some time; they had pointed out that the living area could be enlarged at will by

means of screens; the dining area was part of the living area, giving a feeling of space, and so on. The ladies, however, noted that living was done in all parts of the house; your living, perhaps, should be separated from my living. Certainly the parents' living ought not to be forever a part of the children's living—and vice versa. Some friends of ours with three young children once threatened to move into a one-room apartment. When we asked why, they said whatever room they were in the children wanted to be in, too, so one room would be the simplest way of solving the problem.

One room, however, as is generally agreed by people in every walk of life whether they can do anything about it or not, is inadequate. So is a one-room house: a house that is all living area and no living-by-yourself area. There should be rooms in a house with doors that close firmly against the rest of the family. Ideally, every member of a family group should have one of these rooms. When this is not possible, there should at least be a room for the old and a room for the young.

The Washington women were firm about this. It is called a family room now; in our day we called it the playroom. Whatever it is called, it is the area where the children have their blocks and their pulltoys and their stuffed rabbits with one ear, and later on their record player and their *Encyclopedia of Knowledge* and their sofa with a low table in front of it to hold a tray full of Coke bottles. If in the corner of this family room there is a place for Father and Mother, and if they are invited to occupy it,

that is pleasant, but after all they have their own room, with their record player and their television set, unless the children want it, which might be a good idea, and their books and a place to put their feet up or entertain their rather uninteresting grown-up friends. This division of living areas seemed essential to the women in Washington and it seems essential to me, if in any way possible.

There is another thing to be said about the so-called family room: I fear it has some connection with that phenomenon of recent years called, stickily, togetherness. Frankly, the word togetherness gives me a sharp pain in a vital spot. I remember many years ago when my sister-in-law was pregnant with her first child, an elderly aunt cooed at her that she was so happy to hear they "were going to have a little pledge of love." This, in our family, has ever since been a phrase to excite uproarious, derisive laughter. I feel the same way about togetherness.

It is not that I do not believe members of families should be friends. I hope they are and always will be. Well, no, not always. There is always a moment when any boy would like to hit at least one of his parents and plenty of harassed young mothers, if they told the truth, would now and then admit that they positively disliked little children. In our family, parents and children did a good many things together; we played cards, we sang songs, we took walks. At least once a year we went on a camping trip with our middle-sized sons and I could hardly have enjoyed anything less. But this was a natural flower-

ing of our interest in one another and there was no sentimental word for it.

So the family room is a fine idea as long as the grownups have somewhere else to go when they want to; or when the young folks would like them to. In the old days the family room used to be the kitchen, but it was a big kitchen with a cosy wood-burning stove and a window full of plants and a round table in the center with a red-checked cloth and a kerosene lamp on it and eight or ten chairs thrust side by side under it. The children did their homework there after supper was cleared away, and Grandfather read his Bible and Mother sat by it with her eternal socks to mend and Father read the paper. They were all there together because it was warm; a nice place to get thoroughly heated up before you dashed up to a cold bedroom. After a while they had gone to bed, all except Mother, who kneaded the bread and set it to rise again, and Father, who put a lot of chunks in the stove, tilted the lids to check the fire, and wound the clock. After that, they went to bed, too. We don't have kitchens like this now, not even in the houses we build exactly the way we want them. But as a family room, it could not be beaten.

The ladies wanted a dining room. You may eat breakfast in the kitchen and lunch on the fly, but dinner ought to be a special activity in its special place. If you like, when dinner is over, you ought to be able to go somewhere else and leave the dishes standing on the table. This, to be sure, is not the mark of a good housewife and the mother

I described above in the old family kitchen would never have sat down to her mending until the last pot was wiped and set on the stove to dry; I, too, am constituted so that I like to clear off and wash up before I sit down. Everybody does not agree with this, and if they do not there is no reason for them to spend the evening looking at an empty coffee cup and a half-eaten piece of apple pie. (I don't know what happened to that crust; it didn't turn out right this time.)

Young people seem to agree with the need for a dining room. We recently remodeled a small house for two members of our own family; the most important reason for this was that they wanted a separate room to eat in; although they got a couple of extra bedrooms and a study thrown in for good measure. I do not want to sound too dogmatic about this. The other night when my husband was away, I took my supper on a tray and ate it in front of the living-room fire, with my book propped up alongside me. For one reason or another, plenty of families, large and small, do well enough without a dining room. But if you are building a house and if there are several people in your family, I believe it is well to consider saving money somewhere else and spending it here.

The business of no partitions is carried to extremes, I am told, in certain low-income housing projects. There are not only no doors to the bedrooms but none to the bedroom closets. This seems to me simply an outrage, a condescension to the poor, who, even in a brand-new building with plumbing, are deemed not to need privacy.

When our grandparents hung their clothes on pegs in a corner of the bedroom, they were likely to stretch a curtain over the whole thing. This was partly to keep out the dust, but more I suspect to prevent prying eyes from seeing whether the bottom of your other skirt was muddy or whether you had sewed up that tear in Father's trousers.

Speaking of mud, one of the things the Washington meeting wanted was a mud room. This, I confess, had not occurred to me, but it seems an excellent idea. A room for galoshes and rubbers, a room to wash young feet in summer, a room to brush off accumulations not only of mud but of hay, straw, burdock burs, and other impedimenta from zipper suits before they are hung on their hooks. We always used the side hall as a mud room; it had to be swept out pretty often and it never looked very tidy. In the city, I suppose the vestibule, if you live in a private house, or the area just outside the apartment door must do. Anyhow, if you are building a house, think about a mud room.

The house we now live in all the time is far from a model home. It was built about 165 years ago; that is, the main house was. Two extensions came later. Since the house is on a hill, you step down two steps to the first extension and you used to step down another one for the second until we raised it. The house is a story and a half, so none of the bedrooms is large and they all have one sloping ceiling. From the front door to the farthest back window is probably eighty feet, yet it is rather a small house: twelve rooms, none large by modern standards.

It is probably the most inconvenient house, from the standpoint of housekeeping, that could be imagined. When it was built it wasn't so bad. There was a big kitchen—the family room indeed—also the living room. Off it at one end was a pantry and off the other end a small bedroom. In front were a square parlor and a square bedroom, maybe a guest room, separated by an entrance hall. Upstairs was an open attic where the children slept, unless they slept in the square bedroom. Mama, with the newest baby, slept in the little room off the kitchen, called appropriately the birthing room. The fireplace, in which cooking was of course done, heated the kitchen; in winter, I imagine, the rest of the house was cold; in summer the kitchen must have been uncomfortably hot.

So it was not the most convenient house to live in even at best. Today it is almost absurd. If it should burn down, I suppose we should build something sensible and up-to-date. I pray it will never burn down, because the fact is I like it just as it is.

I like it because the floors are so uneven that a marble placed on one side of the dining room rolls rapidly to the other. I like it because looking through the library, living-room, and side doors, each of the door openings is different from the other and none is quite rectangular. I like it because the floors upstairs are a beautiful warm pine, now that they are sanded; because no two of the four dormer windows are the same size; because the chestnut boards that line the end of the living room are more than two feet wide; because—why, because we have lived

in this house for more than thirty-five years and therefore it is home.

We have managed to acquire an almost perfect heating system; our water system, depending as it does on gravity alone, could not be better. We have enough bathrooms for everybody and enough water heaters to keep them supplied. In short, what with one thing and another, we have made it a comfortable house in spite of its structural and architectural absurdities. I personally could not ask for more.

Yet if I were building a house now—and I earnestly hope I never will—I should have to answer the questions the ladies in Washington considered and many more. It is not economical today to build a house in the colonial style. The great square houses on Brattle Street in Cambridge, with their beautifully proportioned rooms, their high ceilings, their lofty windows, would cost too much first to build and then to maintain. On the top floor of these great houses are certain smallish rooms; no high ceilings there and the windows are small. These are servants' rooms, but we have no servants, or none who live in our house. So we should have to build a small house, one that would be easy to take care of, easy to live in.

However, we want no one-room houses; we want doors that close us in and the rest of the family out. My husband has some cousins who actually live in a one-room house, or say they do. The kitchen is a corner of the big room, the shower room is behind it, there is a long table to eat at and comfortable couches can be made into beds. A one-

room house indeed. Except that the mistress of the house sleeps on the enclosed porch or in a snuggery she has fixed up in the basement; the master has a study with a big fireplace in a separate building. He works there and nearly always sleeps there. A one-room house, in short, with some extra rooms to make living possible. Also, they spend the winters in California.

They do not have a mud room; but come to think of it, they do; it is a small vestibule next to the shower. You peel off your bathing suit after a swim in one of their five beautiful ponds, and you dart into the shower, where presumably you have left your clothes. When you come out you are dressed, in your right mind, and ready for fresh fish from the ponds for lunch.

I love to visit these relatives, but for living day in and day out, I prefer our inconvenient house. The best that I can wish those who are making themselves a house today is that at the end of their lives as at the beginning the house will seem exactly the right place for them and their families to live in.

9

The Caprices of Nature

I LIKE to think that while God was busy with the larger wonders of creation—placing the stars in the sky, ordering the galaxies, separating the waters from the land—while these large enterprises were in train, a group of young Angels became a little obstreperous and bored. The Father of All, although doubtless He might with a wave of His hand have silenced them effectively, chose to give them a task with which to work off their restlessness.

"Go and make things," I believe He might have said. "Make small things; I'll attend to the larger ones. And do it quietly!"

The little Angels were only too happy to obey. "I," said one of the smallest of them, "will color birds' eggs. White birds' eggs aren't any fun, good enough for

hens maybe, but wild birds should have prettier ones."

"Pooh," a larger Angel said, "birds' eggs aren't worth bothering with. I shall do butterflies."

"Pride," said a teen-age Angel quietly. The larger Angel hung his head.

"Wait till you see my birds' eggs," the littlest Angel said; but since he spoke merely with the enthusiasm of the very young and not boastfully, the teen-age Angel did not reproach him. The littlest Angel set to work with a brush and a box of colors. He colored the large egg of the Ibis blue-green like shallow sea water over sunny sands; he put spots, brown spots and red spots, on various eggs, coloring them first gray or pink or blue or green. The spots were brown, small, and regular on the egg of the brown thrasher; on the egg of the sharp-shinned hawk they looked like continents; on the crested flycatcher's egg they were delicately drawn like fern fronds. The eggs were all shapes, some being pointed at the bottom, some almost round, some long and narrow. The littlest Angel had a wonderful time with them. He forgot his boredom, he was no longer restless. I can almost see him, his wings folded neatly over his back, his feet twisted one over the other, and his tongue protruding sidewise from his mouth to mark the seriousness of his endeavor.

Meanwhile, the larger Angel was working on butterflies, not to mention wasps and bees. He painted blue and yellow stripes on the body of one of the long-horn beetles, and a red vest and green pants on another; the moth catocala, a relative of the lowly cutworm, he painted

variegated brown on its upper wings and flame-red and dark-brown on the lower; the butterfly stage of our friend the woolly bear he gave a red body with regular vertical brown spots and dawn-yellow wings, faintly splotched with brown; with the big night moths of June the larger Angel had a heavenly field day: pale-green of luna contrasting with brown, yellow, and pink with one big eye of polyphemus. Resting a minute from his labors, I believe he began twisting a couple of dry twigs in his fingers and all of a sudden he had made the walking stick, to which for good measure he added green wings. Red and black, yellow and brown, teal blue, dark-green and light—the wasps came out bright as rainbows. You have only to consult any insect book to see the larger Angel's handiwork, the result of a wise Father's admonition to stop fretting and find something interesting to do.

Half a dozen Angels took care of the flowers. One devoted himself to lilies alone: blush-pink, pale-green, orange, and red, with spots and stripes and curled petals. If you tell me that many lily varieties were developed long after the dawn of creation, I shall simply reply that the Angels, while they painted some of them at that time, included in the make-up of others the possibilities of future mutation. Perhaps their greatest success was with wildflowers, which have not been as much "developed" as the garden flowers have. Think of the white baneberry, black-spotted white shoebuttons on a red stem; of the red-splattered mountain laurel; of the wild orchids, yellow, pink, and purple and white; of the laughable white-and-

yellow pants of Dutchmen's breeches, and the ghostly stems of Indian pipe.

There were comics among the little Angels. Only one with a real sense of the ridiculous could have put a top-heavy protuberance on the sharp curved beak of the rhinoceros hornbird; only an ironist would have made the full-face of the sea elephant, or the long neck of the giraffe, or the ancient, wise, wrinkled faces of young monkeys. If these creatures were already made, the little Angels improved them, in their own way. They painted the stripes on the zebra and the spots on the peacock's tail; they decided the camel should look imperious and scornful and the skunk and the porcupine should fear nobody.

It is hardly necessary to mention the birds. Who but a small child could have painted red and green on the hummingbird and put the fastest little motor in the world into its minuscule body? Who but a mischievous child could have made the scrawny-necked chick which would grow into a swan? Who but a young comic genius could have made the puffin, red legs, squat black-and-white body, and large, fat, striped bill and head? The brown band around the neck of the plover, the red spot on the chipping sparrow's head, the grosbeaks, red, blue, and yellow, the goldfinch, yellow and brown except for the black-and-white wings—only a child with a paint brush could have made them, a child who wasn't afraid of bright colors and who was particularly addicted to spots and stripes. I rather wonder what happened about the crow.

Perhaps it was the end of the day and the bird-decorating Angel was tired. Perhaps for once he thought he would try glossy black, just glossy black and nothing more—although it came out iridescent in the sun. His sense of comedy triumphed anyway; he gave the crow a loud, raucous voice. Nobody can ever mistake a crow for any other bird. Perhaps the next morning after a good night's sleep he made the jay, giving it all the colors the crow had lacked but keeping the raucous voice and adding for good measure an aggressive disposition and a shocking appetite for sunflower seeds.

These variations among living creatures, both animal and vegetable, are not necessarily useful. Look in your bird book at a page of warblers. The yellow-throated has a yellow chest and a plain gray back; the myrtle has a spot of yellow above the tail, a white throat, and a black vest; the magnolia has black stripes vertically on a yellow breast and white bars on a black tail; the bay-breasted is red-brown on chest and head, the Cape May has the red-brown around the eye, the palm warbler has it on the top of his head. Yet each group will breed true to its marking; the black-and-white warbler will never get red spots; the blackpoll will never turn yellow. Each one was deliberately colored, not just accidentally made up of red and yellow or black and white.

I prefer to think of young Angels carrying out this busy work on a rainy Saturday, doing it for sheer love of color and shape. Make it red, one said; put a green stripe here, another proposes; I like pink, says the third, and

makes flamingoes. To me this is a far more persuasive idea than strict adherence to the theory of natural selection. A warbler with a red head is just as good as one with yellow, as is proved by the fact that both exist and produce their kind. The momentous accidents of the universe, one of which, it is said, produced man, the creature with the big brain, do not account for the humor in nature, for the frivolity. What has the grim process of the survival of the fittest to do with a flash of yellow on a wing or of white on a tail? We can believe that the world was created in seven days if we like, although I remember one of my professors saying that since there are thousands of species of beetles alone, Adam must have had a busy day on Friday naming the animals; we may consider seven days a metaphor and still believe in a Creator who made the universe and all things in it, large and small; or we may incline to the accident theory, trial and error, no plan but survive if you can manage it. None of these accounts for the delightful variations I have been describing.

We learn that bright-colored flowers attract bees; but apple blossoms, pale pink or white, attract them too. I should be more inclined to the accident theory if the warblers varied in color combinations from generation to generation, but of course they do not. Fabre, that tireless examiner of insects, tells us that the grub of the rose chafer wriggles along on its back; this sounds like the survival of the misfit, unless it is another of the little Angels' jokes. Fabre tells us also that the glowworm, which is not a worm but a beetle, shines from start to finish; even the

eggs are luminous and so are the grubs. "If I dig them up," Fabre says, "I find them with their little stern-lights still shining." Why should the glowworm want to attract attention to himself with a lantern while he is lying in the grass waiting for a snail to make his dinner on?

It is these caprices in nature which charm me and for which I have never seen a plausible explanation unless the young Angels provide one. Leaving my own caprices aside, I prefer to believe that somewhere in the process of creation there was an intelligence with a sense of humor, a love of fantasy, an airiness and a delight in manipulating a paintbrush and all the colors of the spectrum.

10

I've Always Wanted To Write

From time to time people ask me questions about writing. It must be so wonderful to write a book, they say. I've had a very interesting life—half of the putative writers say this—but I just wouldn't know where to begin. The other half say sadly: "Nothing interesting has ever happened to me. I've got nothing to write about. A writer must have a fascinating life."

Well, yes and no. However, I have worked out a few simple guides to writing that may be of help to aspiring wielders of the pen. In the first place, throw the pen away. It won't do you a bit of good and will give you bursitis in your forearm besides. Save up your money and buy a typewriter. I find that a typewriter is the indispensable *sine qua non* or *without which not* for literary composition. (It is fair to tell my little pupils that everybody does

not agree with me on this point, beginning with my husband. But after all, *you* asked *me,* and I have to begin with a typewriter.)

Having the typewriter and a lot of unmarked sheets of paper, you get an idea. I don't know where you get it. Mine come to me in a wakeful hour before dawn or while I am driving to town for groceries or in the middle of an absorbing conversation about something entirely different. Suddenly there it is, my idea! Pay no attention to it. Pretend it is not there. If it is a good idea it will stick around, somewhere in the deeps of your brain or your psyche or wherever ideas live. Like my cat Blackie, who when I am eating sits beside me hopefully and now and then puts a gentle, tentative paw on my arm, it will keep coming back to you, enlarged, improved, with additions and amendments. You hope it will.

After a while, depending on the importance of the idea, your moral fiber, the persistence of your publisher, or how many other things you have to do, you may reach the point of sitting down at the typewriter with a clean sheet of paper inserted in it. Look at this paper carefully. It is blank. On both sides. If words appear on it they have to be written by you, tap tap, with three fingers or ten. Personally I use ten, but that is an unimportant idiosyncrasy, the result of a few rash moments in my youth when I learned touch typing.

Type Page 1. It decorates the sheet, it is harmless, and if you are lucky it may lead to something.

We shall now skip rapidly through two hundred and

sixty-five pages. They are covered with typed words, so you must have been writing. The number 265 is chosen at random. I know a woman who is just finishing a 1,200-page novel, but I should not recommend this for the beginner. If you like some other number, although it had better be over 250, stop there.

When you have reached the desired page, write THE END in capital letters. There is no more beautiful sight for any writer. Old newspaper men write *30,* but that is just showing off. I forget what it originally meant; now it just means THE END.

Having reached THE END, remove your last sheet from the typewriter, pile it neatly with the other 264 sheets, and walk around the room, breathing heavily. When you are in command of yourself again, it may be a good idea to read through what you have written. Some people do. Some people feel that it is a mistake. Some people rewrite the whole thing from start to finish. Some throw the 265 sheets in the wastebasket and go back to bookkeeping. We shall not bother with them. *You* are a writer. So there comes a time when the 265 sheets are as good as you can make them. Wrap them in a package. I should be remiss if I did not tell you that a beginning writer named Margaret Mitchell once sent a publisher a suitcase full of old pieces of brown wrapping paper with writing on them and they turned out to be *Gone with the Wind.* You cannot count on this. So wrap yours up securely. Don't enclose a photograph. There will be time for that. Don't tie up the whole thing with baby-blue ribbon; editors,

for some reason, are allergic to blue. If you value your life and the life of your manuscript, include return postage in your package. Where do you send it? Ah, that is the question. Sometimes it seems simpler just to mail it back to yourself; but that is really evading the issue. Perhaps you will send it to a literary agent; perhaps to one of the dozens of publishers who, believe it or not, are dying for a really good book by an unknown writer. They really are.

No matter where you send your manuscript, the chances are that you will get it back again, often decorated with a printed slip that tells you how much the publisher loved it but. Do not believe a word of it; if he really loved it he would publish it. You may get it back several times. There have been famous novels that were turned down more or less politely by from twenty to thirty publishers and accepted by the thirty-first. If the novels are successful enough, the bad-guessers are left with permanently bitten nails and a bad inferiority complex. As a result they accept the next ten novels by unknown writers which come in and they are all flops.

Do not be discouraged. Once a writer always a writer. It is an incurable disease for which there is no bacteriocide. Do not take writing courses unless you like to hear other would-be writers talking about what they have written. Above all, don't wait for what is laughingly called inspiration. Thomas Mann once showed an old friend of ours a battered roll-top desk in his bedroom. "At this desk," he said, "I have sat every morning—every morning for the

last forty years—and written a thousand words." That is probably one of the best ways to become a writer.

I do not mean to be frivolous about this. Hard work and constant work are certainly necessary to any profession, to any art. But in writing, as in any other art, there is an element of mystery. How it is done—the externals of how it is done—differs from person to person. Our neighbor James Thurber rewrites twenty times before he is satisfied; my husband hardly rewrites at all. He waits to set down a sentence until he is sure what he wants the sentence to be. Why it is done, that is sometimes the greatest mystery of all, considering the meager average rewards. It is the inner mechanism, however, that is most baffling. Where do the ideas come from? Where do the characters in a novel come from? It is easy to say: "Of course, you just describe your best friends or your worst enemies." There is more to it than that. It is true that to a writer all experience is somehow translated and transmuted into a subject; but the experience is usually unrecognizable, and when it is recognizable it is usually bad writing. The mystery remains. The situation that shapes itself in the middle of a wakeful night; the conversation between two characters that keeps interrupting you while you are driving in traffic or weeding the garden or even reading another book. One of my best friends believes in ghosts and I do not. At least I have never seen a ghost or heard its ghostly footsteps or its clanking chains. But perhaps I do believe in ghosts after all, ghosts which are around me all the time and occasionally are visible

to the inner eye or audible to the inner ear. They are the ghosts of my own living or reading or the living I have observed in others without really remembering any of it; but they come back to me at odd times—at the oddest times, indeed.

That, to me, is one of the mysteries of being a writer.

I have talked about jumping from Page 1 to THE END. What happens in a single day? I have already established the fact that although I regret it, it is next to impossible for me to write in the country, especially in summer. Too many distractions. The garden. Flowers to arrange. (To a dyed-in-the-wool writer, any excuse to stop writing is as good as any other.) When I am in the country, I have to get in the car and drive twelve miles to the butcher or the laundromat. So it goes. Years ago, I announced that I could not write in the country.

In the city, I said I could. The big, noisy city full of people was just the place to be alone, to sit down at the typewriter, to work hard without interruption for hours. Let me give you an example: The other morning I had an article to write, a modest article, a few pages, maybe twenty, which some amiable editor was actually waiting for. I got up at a respectably early hour. It was still early when my husband had gone uptown and I had nothing in the world, barring a handful of dishes and a couple of beds, to keep me from the typewriter.

First, however, I took a quick look at the morning paper. I admit it. I let myself be just that much distracted from the work at hand, but I was only going to look at

the headlines and maybe read the book and drama reviews. I was halfway through when the bell rang. It was the postman. I felt a pang for my poor husband, who does so love to read his mail before he goes out, and went down to get it, forgetting to take the mailbox key. I had to walk up and downstairs again before I could retrieve the mail. Also, what with a couple of magazines and three circulars, it was wedged into the box so tightly that I had to fish it out piece by piece. I was tired out when I got upstairs again.

There was nothing but a couple of bills for me and a bid to a public dinner for somebody I had barely heard of—twenty-five dollars a couple. My husband's mail looked interesting but I refrained from opening it, except one letter that I knew contained a check. It made a nice pile on his desk and I thought how happy he would be later in the day with all those letters to open. As I put the paper into the typewriter, Walter, the older and fussier of our black cats, got up from his place on the sofa and walked out of the room, the picture of injured dignity. He cannot bear the sound of the typewriter, nor the telephone, television, radio, or most people talking. A sad life.

I discovered I had to—I simply had to—change the ribbon. According to my book of instructions, this is a simple task that takes three motions or maybe four, and does not soil the hands of the operator. This operator made a dreadful thing of it, partly because I couldn't at first find the book of instructions and was doing it the

way I always had. I was ink to my elbows when I at last finished. At that moment the phone rang. It was an old colleague of my husband's who had just spent a year at a college in Florida. The President of the college, it seemed, wanted ardently for my husband to do the same thing. The Florida campus was beautiful. The people were wonderfully friendly. It was altogether a wonderfully friendly conversation. I knew my husband would not go; having determined to retire from teaching in a place he knew and loved, it was highly improbable that he would want to begin teaching somewhere else. I said why not write him a letter, because after all I am not empowered to say, no, no, a thousand times no all by myself. We had quite a little chat. It took nearly fifteen minutes.

With a sigh I turned back to my typewriter, after washing the ink off my hands. I typed the title of my article, the first sentence of which had been rolling around in my mind for some time. If you get your first sentence, you are set; you need not stop for hours. Just then the doorbell rang. It was the gardener. He had come to go over the situation in our community back yard, to ask what I thought should be planted and to tell me what he expected to plant. This is what happens every spring, since I am supposed to be the gardening committee. He is a very pleasant, competent man, but I have never known him to come at a convenient time.

Still, I was not to be thrown off by interruptions. I typed almost a paragraph. The phone rang again. An old

friend wanted me to lunch with her. I can't, I'm writing, I said. I haven't seen you in months, she protested; you're always writing! She wanted to tell me about her new job—maybe it was her new husband. I forget. Anyway, I said no. No. I typed down to the end of page one. The phone rang. Wrong number. But I looked it up, the voice said. Look it up again, I replied sternly.

Page two. How well that looked. I really was getting on. It had not taken me much over two hours to do a page. The phone rang. It was long distance, from Montana. Would my husband come and speak to a large group of teachers or students or whatever, all dying to hear him, for a very good fee? I couldn't say. Why not write him a letter? The party at the other end of the line was rather dubious about the wisdom of this, but I insisted. A letter was really the best way, especially since he was not at home at the moment. Montana sounded quite hurt as he hung up and I felt that it was somehow my fault.

I got to the bottom of page two. Blackie wanted to sit on my lap, from having been sleeping in the box of typewriter paper that was too small for him. I felt suddenly exhausted. I explained to Blackie that I was writing but that I thought I'd take a little rest, and I lay down on the sofa for a while. The doorbell rang. It was the postman, demanding six cents due for forwarding from Connecticut a magazine we didn't want and wouldn't read. When I came back upstairs after getting the six cents, Blackie was sitting in my chair. A good idea, I told him; why don't you type for a while? I didn't really mean it. I had

to write an article. I was just putting page three into the typewriter when the doorbell rang once more.

It was the Fuller Brush man.

How fascinating it is to be a writer.

11

Don't Say It

I WAS once an unhappy witness to a dreadful quarrel between two old friends—or not so much a quarrel as a bitter castigation of one by the other. You did so and so; you said this and that; you failed here, you exceeded there; we hated you for this, you bored us for that, and so on. To all of it the victim could only stammer that she was sorry, she had not realized, she would not have dreamed . . . and she was sorry and sorry and sorry again.

It happened a long time ago and yet it was so cruel, so unexpected, so devastating that I shall never forget it. Many times, as often as in my memory I have heard the harsh voice and seen the contemptuous glance, I have wondered what those two persons think now, feel now about one another. Outwardly, the affair has been patched up, they are friends again, or so it seems. But what are

they really? Has the victim forgiven her accuser? Has the accuser forgiven herself? Or is forgiveness not in order; does such an outburst clear the air, does it bring a human relationship down to a more realistic footing, is it better to get it all said, to tell the truth, to be frank—I have often noticed that the people who promise to be frank are usually critical—so that there will be no possibility of misunderstanding in the future?

On the whole, I believe not. Speech is silver, says the old saw, silence is golden. What the eye does not see—another old saw—the heart does not grieve for; and what the ear does not hear can never bruise the soul.

Indeed, I am convinced of this. There was never, in all the history of the world, a harsh word that was not better left unsaid. This I suppose does not rule out public indignation, righteous wrath. Jesus drove the money changers from the Temple and castigated the tormentors of the woman taken in adultery. Down on a more everyday level, the bitter attack by Macaulay on a book by Robert Southey made literary history. Although today, when every new novel is a masterpiece, the book reviewers seem not to have benefited much by it. Towering anger in a great cause will always have its place; it is as moving as all great passions are moving. If anger is one of the Seven Deadly Sins, it is a more admirable sin than gluttony or avarice. Great anger, that is.

What I am thinking of is small anger; family haggling, bad temper, irritability, and plain snappishness. We all know the husband and wife who cannot resist contra-

dicting, criticizing, or sneering at one another almost as often as they speak; we all know the son who sounds as if he despised his father, the daughter who takes out on her mother all the small pettishness she dares not express to others. "You can ask your mother to do anything," one of my daughters-in-law told me, "you can impose on her as you would never impose on anyone else." This is an affectionate statement of a profound truth. I suspect, however, that too often it becomes less than affectionate; you can say anything mean or ill-tempered to your mother because you know she will not hold it against you; not finally, that is.

The conversation between husband and wife, which has been written many times by better men than me, goes something like this:

She (sweetly): Now here's the leg of lamb and here's the knife and I do hope you won't have any trouble with it.

He (with elaborate patience): I don't anticipate any trouble. Not if the knife is sharp. I assume you have sharpened the knife.

Her laughter is silvery: Darling, I haven't lived with you for twenty-five years without knowing your taste in carving knives.

He (still calm): Any knife will do, dear, so long as it has an edge. All I ask is an edge. It seems a simple, even a reasonable request, doesn't it, my love? But simple requests are often the last ones granted.

She (*with some of the knife's edge sticking to her voice*): Have you tested that knife, darling?

He (*drawing his thumb along the edge*): Not too bad. Not as bad as usual, let us say. Would you be able to lay your hands on the steel, dear?

She (*definitely cool*): I sharpened that knife with my own hands—and the steel—five minutes ago. Why don't you try it? Why don't you start cutting? Other men can carve a leg of lamb. Why can't you?

He (*icily*): I can. With a proper tool. And let me also say, with a smile from the other end of the table. Did anyone ever tell you about the smile, dear? Try it sometime.

By this time the lamb is cold, the partners are hot, and the prospects for a good digestion are hopelessly compromised. If there are others present to witness the little fracas, they are embarrassed, they look down at their plates, they smile absently at one another or fix their eyes on a black spot on the opposite wall, wondering if it is a fly or a fly speck. The principals breathe hard through their noses and—usually—calm down. For a while anyway. Once in a while they do not calm down and presently plates are flying through the air. This, however, is the exception. They are not really violent people, they do not even dislike one another. They may, indeed, be affectionately bound together by long years, shared life, and everyday customs. They cannot resist the riposte, the

chance to be clever; perhaps also the desire to put something over on their partner. They do not say, I'll show him; they may not even think it; but somewhere inside them this longing for superiority is demanding to be heard.

I submit that she might have done one of several things if she had wanted to avoid trouble. She might have brought the steel and the knife to her spouse and said, with a bright but not too bright smile, "You are the only one who can sharpen a knife properly." At this he would beam kindly on her and proceed to his duty. If this seems excessive, she might have said simply, "I just sharpened the knife." Finally she might have carved the lamb herself out in the kitchen and brought the slices in on the platter. This is probably the safest way, although it does run the risk of complaint: "What's the matter? Don't you think I can carve a leg of lamb?"

Ah, me!

It is not easy to avoid the retort discourteous. There are times when it seems not only the quickest but the most logical way to reply. But speed and even logic are not as comforting as peace. The trouble with the snappy comeback is that it inevitably provokes another snap. The rhetorical questions—what do you take me for, who do you think I am, who do you think *you* are, why would you do that, and the like—in addition to the adverbs *never* and *always,* could in the interest of family harmony be eliminated from the language and would

have been long ago if strife, at least in its early stages, had not been more exciting than its opposite.

Never and always. You always forget to take the key out of the car. You never carry your coffee cup out to the kitchen before you go to bed. And of course the more sweeping, You never think of anybody but yourself or You always make me feel like a fool—but these are remarks made when the argument is well along toward the boiling point. Never and always can begin the conversation, too, as in Darling, I wonder why you never close the door quietly. Or a slight variation: Did it ever occur to you, dear, that I might like to look at my own letters *first!*

I have inserted the endearments in these statements because they so often accompany the sarcastic tone. Words of love that come from the heart have nothing to do with the matter; dear and darling are as much a part of a small-sized or everyday row as the peck on the cheek is part of the greeting between comparative strangers. Jennie kissed me; indeed she did, and Tom, Dick, and Harry, too, not to mention their sisters, cousins, aunts, and uncles. Everybody kisses everybody these days, for hello and good night, for happy birthday, Merry Christmas, and a Safe and Sane Fourth. To object would be churlish and I am not objecting here. I merely aver that endearments in an argument have a hollow ring. Nobody would say What a blackguard you are, dear; that is, if he meant it. I could do without the darling in a remark like Darling, I should like a little butter; it's right at your elbow and

has been since we sat down at the table. It is not necessary to say darling; all that needs be said is Please pass the butter. Or you can simply point.

The chief trouble with remarks such as I have described is not so much that they provoke a quarrel, which so often they do, as that they are habit-forming. It is just as easy to say please pass the butter and it takes less breath; but the elaborate make-believe courtesy, accompanied, if there are other people present, by a smile which says how inconsiderate one's spouse is, this pseudo-politeness is like a drug. The first sniff is so easy; it often provokes a laugh from the uncomfortable bystander. What a clever little fellow I am, you say to yourself. Let's try this again; and you do, and he does, and the sparring match is on.

The worst aspect of family rows, large or small, is not the discomfort of the others who hear them. Sometimes there aren't any others. For though a real addict loves witnesses, once the smart-rejoinder habit is well established, it gets going any time and in any place, no matter if the participants are in Times Square or alone in Darien. No, it isn't the folks standing by. When I was a child I was always falling down and skinning my knee. The sore would heal, but the bruise remained for a long time, beginning with a purple patch and ending, sometimes a whole summer later, with a yallery-greenery area that looked faintly gangrenous. Being a rather awkward child, I often fell again on the same knee; the sore would reopen and ooze whenever I took a bath; the black-and-blue spot would darken once more, and for a long time there would

be a place which responded painfully when I pressed it with my finger. So with harsh words. The first bruise is minor, it hardly breaks the skin. Yet the sore spot is there. Bruised again in the same place, the discoloration increases and persists. You remember it long after it has apparently healed.

Although quarrels are usually followed by reconciliations and protestations of I didn't really mean it, there is still a tender area. Sometimes in the middle of the night your own or your partner's nasty crack returns to you. For your own, you may feel chagrin; from the other's, you are probably still a little black and blue.

Let me say that in these matters, although I am being so free with advice, I am by no means without sin. But I try. I really do try. I know how easy it is to form bad habits and how hard they are to break. I know that making sarcastic remarks can be a habit and a bad one, no matter how clever they may sound. Count ten, said the wise proverb. Wise indeed. When I was trying to stop smoking, I found that if I could refrain for as much as two minutes, the nervousness that had made me reach for a cigarette would often pass. I didn't want it any more, not then. Counting ten may not be enough. Count twenty; hold your breath; change the subject; leave the room. But don't say it.

On the occasions when I have been able to remember these admonitions, I have been secretly pleased—secretly, because in the nature of things nobody can ever hear the clever remarks that are not made—by how

happy I am. I am in no danger, my nature being what it is, of becoming immersed in a perpetual bath of loving-kindness; but now and then I take a quick dip in it, and it is really refreshing.

12

Our Debts and Our Debtors

I HAVE been thinking about sin. And as President Coolidge said of the preacher whose sermon on the subject he had just heard, I am against it.

I do not mean small sins, the I'm-awfully-sorry-but-we-have-a-date-on-Monday type of sin, when you merely want to stay home and finish the book you are reading. I do not, at the moment, even mean what the church calls venial sin, the dictionary definition being an offense against God's law without full awareness of its seriousness. No, by sin I mean mortal sin, deadly sin, the kind which—dictionary definition again—causes the death of the soul.

What are the deadly sins that cause the death of the soul? I usually forget one or two when I try to list them, so I looked them up to make sure. They are, of course, pride, anger, envy, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust.

It will be seen that the sins fall into two categories of three each, with another, sloth, between. The first three have to do with the spirit, the last three the body; sloth, I learned when I began studying about sin, is not equivalent to lying in a hammock while your grandmother mows the lawn; it is laziness of the spirit, refusal to practice virtue, perhaps a denial of goodness. Yet however you group the seven deadly sins, there is one thing common to at least six of them.

Take pride. You say I am proud of my son. Is that a sin? Or I am proud of my school or my country. None of these is a sin, I believe, any more than it is a sin to say I sure am proud of the way those evergreens have grown that we set out last spring. The only danger in these examples of pride is complacency. Personally, I think that the fates which watch over us dislike complacency; as soon as you feel that all is well with you, look out! The precipice is just around the next corner. Pride is something else again. The dictionary defines pride as "excessive belief in one's own worth." That is sin; and the key word is excessive.

Excess. Avarice is wanting more, being greedy, usually for money. Lust is excessive desire, usually sexual desire but not necessarily. Anger is excessive response to wrong, real or imagined. Gluttony is eating too much. Envy is excessive desire for something belonging to another. When a man commits any of these excessive acts, he is more than a man, his desires are more than a man should desire, he is in danger of destroying himself as a man.

The seventh deadly sin, the spiritual sin of sloth, sluggishness, laziness of the mind and spirit, is not a sin of excess. If we say the first six sins are pluses, the seventh is a minus. A slothful man is less than a man. A slug is a perfectly respectable creature of what we sometimes like to call the lower orders; a man who acts like a slug is not a man. He is not a good slug either. A cat can be greedy, a dog can growl fearsomely, a monkey can display lustful desires in public, a peacock can preen his great tail and strut about, and none of them is acting out of character. None of them is causing the death of the soul, if animals have souls, which we are taught to doubt.

It is only man, burdened with that mystery the soul, who is enjoined to avoid excess. This may be because excess in any form is likely to lead to something else. The miser may become the thief; the angry man may commit murder; the man given over to lust hurts others as well as himself; the glutton comes down with gastritis and shames himself as a man by selling his birthright for a mess of pottage.

I am groping in the dark here and any theologian could set me right in a jiffy. Not that we have as many theologians as we used to. I remember talking to a young man who was a student at a celebrated divinity school. What do you study, I asked him. He told me psychology, ethics, economics, church history, and so on. Theology? I asked. No, he said, we don't study theology. He did not say, we don't study theology any more, but I saw it in his eyes. Theology, if my meager Greek serves me, is the study of

God. The divinity student was mainly studying men and their problems in relation to other men. In so far as he studied the Bible, I suppose it was as the story of men long ago.

So, still groping in the dark, I assume that God wants us to act like men in a rather restricted sense; not to let our desires wander like those of a peacock or an ape, not to smother our spirit or deny our capabilities and become a slug (who is not denying his), but to walk in a Golden Mean, an alley between two extremes; to avoid excess because we are not competent to handle it. We tend to go to extremes.

At first thought this may seem to be a humdrum existence, walking in our little alley between the walls over which we may not climb on the one side or on the other. It is not humdrum, first because it is so difficult, and anything difficult has always excited man's imagination. It is not easy to walk our narrow alley. It is rough underfoot, there are great winds that whirl around us; every so often there is the most tempting path, leading up and over the wall on the right. If we are old and experienced, we ignore the path. At the top of it there may be the glint of gold—false gold it surely is, or one of those colored photographs of strawberry shortcake we see in the slick-paper magazines. Beware of it; the whipped cream is nothing but shaving soap, the berries may well be painted cardboard, both of which photograph better than the real thing. Or if it is a luscious steak dripping with butter, the butter is undoubtedly varnish; steak with

varnish looks more like steak with butter than steak with butter does. The fool's gold leads us to the sin of avarice; the false food that does not nourish us to gluttony.

Up on the other side of the walk there is another path, with a hammock under a summer branch; the sun flickers down on it through the leaves and it sways invitingly in the breeze. You may lie in it and forget that you are a man with a man's chores to do. Ignore the hammock. Hammocks are for slugs. Plod on. Climb that hump of rock; walk around that puddle. Keep your eyes on the way ahead and once in a while, far at the end of it, you may see something like a rainbow.

Why should this be so hard for man, to avoid the extremes which destroy him? It is not hard for the cat or the bird. Either one has no trouble living according to his nature. The snake is not a low creature because he crawls upon the ground, and he does not try to become a butterfly in order to improve his situation in life. It is only man, the poor little walker between walls, who eternally tries to get out, to do something different, something big and supermanly and exciting, something which is practically certain to get him into trouble.

For the truth is that nobody really enjoys being a sinner. The glutton has an everlasting bellyache, a permanent ulcer; the angry man beats his head against a wall until he has a concussion; the gold does not warm the miser, nor the lover comfort the one who lusts after him; the sluggard devotes his life to sleep and wakes sporadically after bad dreams. The snake, seeing his world from

an elevation only slightly higher than his back, has more fun; the bird, free to fly, that miracle of motion, nevertheless has to devote all his waking minutes to food-gathering in order to stay alive and keep his progeny from starving. Yet he acts as if he enjoyed flying and he does not try to be a lap dog, eating goodies from the hand of his mistress.

By this time my putative theologian may have given me up in disgust. These are grave matters and I am unschooled in them. I will leave mortal sin for the moment and disclose what I consider to be the worst sin of all. It is lack of charity. Here I am on more solid theological ground, on the same side as St. Paul if considerably behind him, and I can use him for a shield while I proclaim my conviction. Charity is the greatest virtue; want of charity is the greatest fault. I was interested to see how closely St. Paul, in the Thirteenth Chapter of Corinthians, follows the seven deadly sins: "Charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil." This pretty well takes care of most of the seven deadly sins. St. Paul could probably not imagine a man being a glutton and he was much too busy to bother with sloth. Besides, he had more to say about charity: "Charity," he said, "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth. Though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the

poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." And working back to the beginning, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."

These words in praise of virtue and love have probably never been surpassed in the records of men. Every day we have the opportunity, if we only make use of it, to translate them into our own lives. Our literature is full of such translations: Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly with Thy God is one such; He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone is another; there, but for the Grace of God, go I is still another; Judge not, lest ye be judged —how like a judgment the words sound in themselves. These noble statements of charity are not for every day perhaps. They are for the periods of suffering, the bitter ordeals, the moments of anguish which fortunately do not come too often to any of us. When they do come it is a help to remember the great words. For ordinary life, we can try something less momentous; something simple like waiting a while before repeating a piece of gossip, no matter how interesting—and then forgetting to repeat it; or really forgetting, not forgiving but forgetting, an injury; or not kicking a fellow when he is down. If these are not great acts of charity such as St. Paul describes, they are hard enough to keep us occupied day in and day out.

One of the reasons that *Gone with the Wind,* by Margaret Mitchell, was read so widely was, I believe, the character of Melanie, the "other woman," the foil to the

more brilliant and exotic Scarlet O'Hara. She was simply a great lady; she literally did not know about vulgarity or lack of affection or fraud. So that if her husband and Scarlet were for years half in love with one another, she never knew it; if she ever knew it, she thought no evil of it; certainly she never admitted by word or act that she knew it. Her charity was so great that certain things could go on under her very eyes and she be unaware of them. When this happens in real life, and it does happen—there are people equally impervious to evil—the evil itself tends to diminish. With a gentle person you yourself become more gentle; with a just person you try to be just; it is less fun to pass on a bit of unfriendly gossip to someone who smiles and says nothing than it is to one who nods and asks for more and contributes her own measure of poison.

Well, that is the narrow way between the walls along which we are urged to walk. Most of us manage to avoid mortal sin—most of the time; few of us achieve true charity. To commit mortal sin requires enormous energy, daily devotion to the task, neglect of everything else in life. Charity is not easy either, but a little of it goes a long way, and a second act of charity is easier after you have performed the first. If bad habits are soon acquired and hard to break, good ones are almost as much so. At least I hope they are. I should not like to feel that charitable persons were born and never could be made. If that were so, the path to the slothful hammock under the tree might be the only one for us to travel.

13

Men, Women and Cats

Two members of our family are cats. They are ordinary shorthairs, both black and white, each has four white feet and a white waistcoat, both have long, white whiskers. Friends, even close friends, have difficulty in distinguishing them. "Is that Walter or Blackie?" they ask. To us there is no problem. They are as different as night from day.

Blackie is sweet, stubborn, greedy, and has an apparently placid disposition entirely free of nerves; however, he gets carsick on trips between Connecticut and New York. Walter, on the other hand, is a bundle of complexes, he hates all noise in the home, he is proud and reserved, he tolerates Blackie, who wants to sleep with him wherever he is, but his digestive system is equal to the disturbance of changing from the city to the country or

vice versa. Even physically they are different—to us. Blackie is stouter—he ought to be, he eats more—thicker, and has a fluffier coat; Walter is lean and sleek. I can see one of them far down in the meadow back of our country house, three or four hundred feet away, and can recognize him simply by the way he walks, by the silhouette he presents while stalking a mouse.

Yet they are indubitably cats, black-and-white cats, members of the same breed, species, even sex, and both deprived of the functional attributes of the latter by the same process. Generalizations of a very broad sort might be made about them, but I am suspicious of them as I am of most generalizations.

Particularly of the generalizations about men and women.

Obviously there are differences between them. But I have long felt that these differences do not put them inescapably into two classes. I hear someone say: "Isn't that just like a woman!" and I bridle. I hear another insist: "Only a man would do that!" and I shrink. Of course these omniscient and condescending remarks are always made by a member of the opposite sex.

I do not believe that men are exclusively like men or women like women. I doubt that men are always brave and strong, clearer-headed than women, more apt to understand mathematics, better cooks, and less able to bear pain. Neither do I admit that women are always less romantic than men, more unscrupulous, cattier, or more patient with young children. These categorizations are

familiar to all of us, and many more like them. Women are the mothers of the race and as such are fitted to bear and forbear, to suffer, to defend their young against all comers, which they do if necessary with tooth and claw. Men are the creators, the artists, the painters, the poets, the continent builders. Was Homer a woman (there is, of course, a theory that he was), was Plato or Chaucer or Michelangelo or Leonardo, was Mozart or Beethoven, was Tolstoi or Freud or Einstein? Who have you women got except possibly Sappho and Jane Austen and Emily Dickinson, Joan of Arc, St. Theresa, and Eleanor of Aquitaine —and a sadly assorted lot they are!

To all this it is possible simply to say phooey, but that is not a proper answer. It is just like a woman.

Consider how we apply adjectives. We say that a man is womanish to mean that he is weak; it is a derogatory description. Yet when we say a woman is like a man we do not mean that she is strong, we mean that she is unwisely imitating a man, and not his worthier qualities. A womanly woman is a man's favorite kind, tender, wise but in an unobtrusive way, patient, gentle. A manly man is also man's favorite; he is big, muscular, kind to animals, probably smokes a pipe, and can carry his liquor. Women do not care much for "womanly" women and some of them do not even like manly men. These adjectives which ought to be simply descriptive are often enough controversial; which means to me that they are not truly descriptive. There is something wrong with them.

We all know men who are gentle, kind, and patient;

men who are great gossips; men who talk too much, who backbite, who can't hammer a nail straight (yes, I do), who are so stoical when they are ill that they become a nuisance to the women who have to nurse them. We know women who are first-rate at business, women who can keep books competently, who hold their tempers under provocation, who do not chatter, and women, alas, who will smack an offspring for apparently no reason at all. If it is said that no living woman is a poet like Shakespeare, no living man is either, nor has been since Shakespeare died. Of the greatest artists there are only a handful in our history. It is true that they are all men. I am not sure it will always be true. Perhaps our modern industrial society is freeing women from certain of the obligations to everyday living that used to hamper them. If that is not what hampered them, if when gadgets get them out of the kitchen and the nursery women do not then become great artists, then somebody will have to reconsider my premise. It will not be me, because I shall have long since departed to another world.

What I am trying to say is that men and women, like our two black cats, are perfectly recognizable as people, even as members of opposite sexes, but beyond that they are themselves, they combine in all sorts of ways all sorts of human traits. It was thought that when women got the vote, voting habits would change, better candidates would be elected to office, more attention would be paid to character and less to political hackery. Why should this be true? A thousand women voters average up about the

same as a thousand men. They are not more than occasionally interested in the subject of their rights as citizens; they inform themselves only casually about the qualifications of the candidates; they vote if it is convenient, according to party labels as a rule. Some women, of course, take government seriously; they are informed, industrious, scrupulous in their reasons for making a choice. Some men are, too.

An interesting thing is happening in Soviet Russia. (We always get around to Russia sooner or later.) The census recently taken announced that as a result of the tremendous number of war deaths, there are 55 per cent of women to 45 per cent of men. More Russian women are doctors today than men; probably as many if not more are scientists and technicians; women engineers are a commonplace. For the first time, perhaps, we have a testing ground where women can really stand out. It is a pity that artists in the Soviet Union are not truly free; and that even scientists are hamstrung to a certain extent by ideology. It is barely possible that in another generation in the Soviet Union we may see a women novelist of the stature of Tolstoi or a woman scientist who could take her place by—but I cannot think of any really first-rate Russian scientist or philosopher of the caliber, say, of Aristotle, who was both.

It is a commonplace, said first perhaps by Eve and often in our time by the advocates of women's rights, that women are people. What the women's righters meant was that women are Just As Good as men. I think it is putting

it a little differently to say that both men and women are people first and men and women afterward. Just as Walter and Blackie are cats and then are distinguished by individual characters.

Consider what happens in any passably well-adjusted marriage. Man and wife have both promised before witnesses to love and to cherish. Yet there is a general feeling that man is the protector, he takes care of the family, by providing the major portion of the family support, by going downstairs at night if there is a funny noise to find out if it is a burglar or the cat.

I suggest that each takes care of the other. In our family the division of labor and responsibility goes on all the time. The man of our family has certainly contributed most of the family income, although I have added what I could. I decide how it shall be spent—most of it—and I spend it, nor do I have to give an accounting. Indeed, my husband finds the ledger I keep for income-tax purposes so frightening that he will hardly look at it, although he pays it, and me, extravagant respect. He, of course, buys certain things for which he has a passion, like postage in job lots; nothing makes him happier than rolls of stamps and piles of stamped envelopes. He likes to buy socks; indeed his bureau drawer is so full of socks that when he brings in another half-dozen, I surreptitiously remove an equivalent number to make room. The other day he bought a truck for our country place, not like the old truck we had had for twenty years, practically a museum piece, which everybody in town knew and laughed

at, albeit affectionately. No, indeed, this is a real truck, only three years old, large, handsome, comfortable to ride in. It will be like a second car, he tells me. I do not remind him that all last summer we had a second car in one belonging to our son which was left with us. There is no limit to the interesting objects from leaves to wood to bean poles to gravel that we can carry in the new truck. I say it is a dandy truck and I am delighted to have it.

Then there are household duties. He makes the fires, having first carried in the wood; he puts up storm windows, repairs worn electric wires, does a thousand odd jobs of carpentry. He is a pretty good plumber, mostly outdoors at one of the ponds or the brook, a passable painter (I am really better at that although we both hate it), and a top-notch vegetable gardener. However, although he keeps a tidy garden for the first half of the summer, by the time the plants are well grown he considers they are on their own, and can do their own fighting with weeds.

There are innumerable other ways in which the man of the household takes care of me. I, in turn, keep the house in order, buy supplies, furnish meals at whatever time we want them. I see that there are enough clean shirts in the drawer, that the multifarious socks are mended, that winter clothing is protected from moths, that guests are invited from time to time and nourished when they come. There are even times when I carry the wood if he is away, and I am quite able to do it, not to mention making a good enough fire on the principles laid down by the

master fire maker: you put the small sticks and the paper against the back log (his back logs are bigger than mine) and a couple of larger sticks on top and then you light it. It works, too. I make fires, I say, and if I have to I can drive a nail. He, if he has to, can make his bed, but of that the less said the better. Years ago when I was away in the summer, my husband made his bed, and the window cleaner who was working in the house started upstairs and tiptoed down again. He had looked into our bedroom, seen a sort of mound under the counterpane, and had assumed the head of the house was in bed and asleep. Never mind; he is an excellent breakfast cooker, although when he is alone his cooking runs to hot dogs and hamburgers. There is no end to the tasks we do as part of our own characters and now and then imitating the other.

Apart from our children, who gave and still give rise to an additional set of family activities—but they are after all grown up now and can take care of themselves—apart from them, since my husband and I have reached that particular time of life, I wonder how either of us would get on without the other. I know this problem has to be faced every hour of the day by somebody. The survivor picks up the pieces and there are kind young people to help and life goes on. But it must be different; it must be very different. Fortunately, like everything about the future, it is unknowable and therefore unimaginable.

What may be learned after long association in friendship or marriage is that each partner in the relationship finds something of himself in the other. A man is not a

Man in a box with a wall around him. His humanness partakes of the humanness of the person or persons closest to him. He is neither man nor woman but a human being. If he is lucky, he has learned something about another human being. If he is especially lucky, he has learned something about himself.

14

Novels, Old and New

A WHILE ago I got to reading Dostoevsky. I started with *The Brothers Karamazov,* which I had read many years before and seen recently in the movies. Then I went on to *Crime and Punishment, The Idiot,* and that strange, formidable novel which used to be called *The Possessed* but now in an excellent new translation by David Magarshak is entitled *The Devils.* I had a wonderful time reading them all; I wanted to read very fast because the story was so fascinating, and I wanted to read slowly so as not to miss anything that was going on page by page; the description of character, the building-up of action, the family scenes, the scenes of violence, the long-drawn-out deaths—and the talk! Always the talk, about life, love, God, good and evil, men and women, the Russian past, the Russian future. *The Devils,* written in the 1860's, has

as perceptive and accurate a description of the Soviet revolution as any present-day historian with hindsight and a file of *Pravda* and *The New York Times* at his elbow could devise.

It was a great experience, reading Dostoevsky. When I had finished, and I haven't really finished because I mean to go back for more, I thought of Dickens; and Jane Austen.

Jane Austen may seem a strange companion to the desperate, disorderly gambler, the writer who was always driven to write another page because he needed the money so badly, who hated to meet deadlines yet met them, who wrote feverishly and fast, a novel in a few weeks and another version in a few more, and a third, a fourth, up to a seventh, changing the plot, changing the ending, adding or subtracting characters, altering, editing, and at last miraculously coming out with the particular installment of a serial at the final moment when it was acceptable. Jane Austen was not like that. I can see her now, sitting quietly at home with her mother and sister, or in her brother Edward Knight's drawing room with his numerous family around her. Her lapboard is on her knee; her pen is in her hand. There must have been a little inkwell in the corner of the lapboard. I have such a board that belonged to my grandmother. She writes a bit and watches; one of the nieces or nephews say something to Aunt Jane and she answers with a remark that is gently acid, brilliantly perceptive. She hears everything, sees everything, knows everything; although she remains

a lady, a spinster, one who accepts without question the limitations of her society and at the same time knows that emergencies are always arising in which these limitations are transcended.

What Jane Austen had done when she had completed a novel on the board that rested on her knee was create a world. This is what Dostoevsky has done, and Dickens too. Much of what they wrote took place in the nineteenth century. Yet their three worlds could not have been more different; the mannerly world of the English country gentry, with a glimpse now and then of London or Portsmouth or Bath; the sprawling world of the London slums, the poor, the feckless, the wicked, the oppressed, the triumph of virtue, the power of goodness, the defeat of vice and evil; and the strange, multi-colored, tumultuous world of St. Petersburg or of a Russian village with a self-contained society (Miss Austen's villages have a self-contained society, too); a city or a village where the slums are worse than London, where the contrasts between comfort and squalor are greater, where the rich are richer, the poor poorer, but where with a few outstanding exceptions virtue is rewarded and vice punished. In creating these three worlds, our authors have of course filled them with people: people who are born, who as children may be noisy and rude, who suffer, are punished, or are spoiled; people who grow up, fall in love, marry the wrong person or the right one, are as long-suffering as Griselda or as dishonest as Becky Sharp. These characters commit murder—no, not in Miss Austen's world—or adultery—

no, not in Dostoevsky's, except perhaps remotely and long ago. They are betrayed and they betray; they cheat, lie, steal, and covet their neighbor's goods. Conversely, they exhibit the virtues which are opposed to these vices.

Whatever they do, however outlandish, is credible; whatever they say is inevitable. Their worlds are real worlds, we see and feel them; they are real people, we find ourselves thinking about them after we have closed the book and ended the tale. The worlds seem complete, well-rounded, as if London in the nineteenth century was just so; St. Petersburg could not have been any different. Life was like that; people were like that—and are still.

The great novels have always been violent. They have always had for their subject the extremes of human behavior from saintliness to rape. Yes, Miss Austen had her rape, too, in *Sense and Sensibility,* the rape of a fourteen-year-old girl by the handsome and unprincipled Willoughby, who thereafter abandoned the girl and her illegitimate child. He lived to regret it, to be sure; and he lost the heroine whom he truly loved because of his lack of principle. *Sense and Sensibility* also has one of the examples, in Jane Austen, of vice unpunished. Her Miss Lucy Steele is as unprincipled in her way as Willoughby in his; unlike him, however, she is not disappointed. For a time she offends her husband's mother by her rash marriage, but by flattering and fawning upon the old lady, she reinstates both herself and her husband in his mother's affections and recaptures the income that for a while had been withheld from them.

How would these matters be treated in modern novels? For it is of modern novels that my rereading of Dostoevsky and my recollection of Jane Austen and Dickens make me think. The rape of a girl of fourteen: why, yes, we have a book about it, only the girl was really twelve and she did the raping. *Lolita,* however, is not the book I was thinking of; *Lolita* is in a class by itself. Its subject matter is in many ways distasteful, but its extraordinary wit cannot be denied. It is brilliantly written and completely moral. The protagonist knows he is a bad man and he regrets his acts; moreover, he is properly punished for them by death, the ultimate punishment.

No, not *Lolita.* Let us, instead, take *Peyton Place* which I am told has sold more than eight million copies in the paperback edition. Eight million copies! It must have something, and it does; it has the narrative pull that will not let the reader alone until it is finished. I couldn't put it down—the oldest cliché in the book business and not without its truth. But *Peyton Place* is also a sordid story about empty people. Not vulgar people; Dickens and Dostoevsky wrote about vulgar people all the time; Miss Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility* is the epitome of vulgarity. But she is not empty. Her miserable little skull is crammed with plots; she is thinking all the time, conniving all the time, managing all the time, her life and the lives of people around her. Whereas the chief female character in *Peyton Place*—I do not remember her name —is stuffed with cotton wool and covered with some synthetic material, probably one of the polyethelene fibers.

The chief male character is supposed to be the principal of the local high school; but he never gives any evidence of interest in or competence for such a position. He is solely concerned with wooing the chief female character who, having been betrayed in her youth, puts up a pretty show of reluctance for several hundred pages until at last she is won and is blushingly happy when her husband pats her posterior.

However, the premarital bed scenes are handled with the greatest explicitness. We know everything that happened, right down to the climax. This is also true of a much better book, *By Love Possessed.* This tells of love both sacred and profane, love in the marital bed and love in the back seat of a motor car, not to mention the broken-down couch in the garden house. However, James Cozzens writes of other matters also. (*Peyton Place,* to be sure, does have another memorable scene where half a dozen pillars of the town shut themselves in a cellar and drink themselves into foul insensibility.) *By Love Possessed* is literate, adult, and deeply concerned with good and evil. It is not comparable to Dostoevsky, but it knows where the great subjects can be found: that is to say in the human heart, the poor, miserable, weak, terribly serious, and sometimes ecstatic human heart, which is always meaning to do better and hardly ever manages it.

There are many contemporary novels which indicate that man's—and woman's—chief and seemingly only concern is hopping in and out of bed. The bed has become the first article of furniture in the house; or if you do not

have a bed, the lawn will do or a spot in the woods or the deck of a boat; any horizontal surface, indeed, including a parquet floor. The very thought of it makes my bones ache. If there is simply no horizontal surface available, all of them being occupied by coupling couples—but why go on? We gardeners are only too familiar with the love life of the Japanese beetle and I have flung not two but many a trio of them into a cup of kerosene without a pang.

I do not believe that making love is the only interesting occupation of human beings. I do not believe that it is the only occupation worth writing about or that it needs to be revealed in every detail. Each experience of love, in spite of Dr. Kinsey, must differ somewhat from every other; each must have its own component of desire, duty, commerce, or delight. Nearly every reader has had something of this experience, as he has had the experience of wiping his nose or drinking a glass of water. If you tell me you need a handkerchief, I can imagine you wiping your nose; if you say you are thirsty, I can imagine you drinking, water or something else. Once in a while a truly great writer comes along and he makes of the common experience of drinking a glass of water something uncommon, real beyond reality, imagined beyond the farthest reaches of the imagination, something that makes you cry or laugh or both together.

Not every writer is so gifted. Yet water is a fundamental necessity of the human organism. Everybody drinks water; everybody must drink water; if he doesn't,

he will die of thirst, by all reports a most unhappy death. If every writer told you all the details of taking a drink—the first symptoms of thirst, the walk to the faucet, filling the glass, raising it to one's lips, the taste, the involuntary action of the esophagus, the feeling of refreshment, of release; no more desire, no more thirst, just lean back and enjoy life—if literally every novelist described this action to you in some such detail, you would die not of thirst but of boredom.

It is fair to say that making love is a more complicated and more interesting operation than drinking a glass of water, unless you are really about to perish in the desert; but it is not the only complicated and interesting operation which man engages in. Yet many of today's writers would have us believe so. Dickens wrote some twenty-odd novels and mentioned the subject only in the most oblique and delicate way. This is said to be Victorian prudery; surely the Dickens characters made love, but Dickens was too repressed to mention it (although there is some reason to believe that he himself lived in a *menage à trois* for several years) and his readers would have been horrified if he had. It may be. I once heard of a man who could hardly read a modern novel because none of the characters ever went to the toilet. This, perhaps, will be the next subject our modern writers will take up in detail, forgetting that James Joyce and, long before him, Jonathan Swift covered the subject pretty thoroughly.

I do not think that Dickens or Dostoevsky or Jane Austen was entirely actuated by Victorian prudery. It is true

that the censor or their readers would not have permitted them to include details of the bed. It is also true that they had other things to write about; many, many other things: the most delightful bore in literature, for example, Miss Bates in *Emma;* one of the most truly wicked men, who incidentally escapes punishment (Peter Verkhovensky in *The Devils*); a man compounded of every sort of folly, weakness, and excess, yet lovable (Dmitri in *The Brothers Karamazov*); Nicholas Nickleby, David Copperfield, Elizabeth Bennett, Lady Catherine de Burgh, and the fortunes and misfortunes of each of them. The list is long. They all loved somebody, even if it was self-love; somebody loved nearly every one of them. Yet not one is ever seen by the reader in bed with a member of the opposite sex.

If that is the age of Victoria, consider an earlier time, before Victorian prudery had been invented. I recently read a book by Nancy Mitford, called *Madame de Pompadour.* Madame de Pompadour, it tells us, was the lover and friend of a king for twenty-five years. King Louis XV made heavy demands on his bed companions; after a few years Madame de Pompadour could not endure the physical strain of the King's sexual desires. Yet she remained his mistress and loving friend until she died, and the King took his casual pleasure elsewhere. She was endlessly entertaining to him, merry, lighthearted, wise, cheerfully middle-class, outspoken, loyal to her family as well as to her royal master. When her funeral cortège passed under the windows of the palace, the servants closed the shutters

to keep the painful sight from the King. But although a freezing rain was falling, he went out on the balcony and watched until the procession was out of sight. The tears poured down his face. "That is the only tribute I can pay her," he said.

Halfway through the quarter century of their relationship, there is good reason to believe they stopped going to bed together. In spite of this, they not only remained devoted friends but they never seemed to run out of subjects of conversation.

The fashion in novels may change. It has changed plenty of times before. Think of the days of Harold Bell Wright or of Elinor Glyn. We may shortly exhaust the subject of love-making. Every possible detail having been described, writers may turn to other subjects, of which there are not a few.

I should be happy if this were the case. Meantime, I must get back to Dostoevsky.

15

The Shadow of Our Doom

THERE was a time when many thousands of persons believed that in the year 1,000 the world would end. When the fateful date approached, toward the end of December 999, the most confirmed believers sold or gave away their property or simply abandoned it, for no like-minded neighbor would want it, and packed their spiritual suitcases for the inevitable cataclysm.

It did not come. Nearly a millennium later we are still struggling along. Sometimes the day of doom seems happily far away. More often, as we are constantly warned, it looms frighteningly near.

We are told that weapons are at this moment made and easily available for launching that would destroy our planet and every living thing thereon. People write books about this disaster, the characters usually being half a

dozen survivors with built-in differences of political conviction, religion, or color which the reader knows very well are going to lead to trouble.

Hardly a day passes that a scientist is not quoted in the newspapers as predicting calamity. We read about strontium 90 in the milk, about the increase of leukemia in young children. Islands in the Pacific disappear; a large portion of the Nevada desert is, we have reason to believe although we are not permitted to see it, rendered uninhabitable even as desert. It is a no-man's-land of horror where even the cactus, the scorpion, and the rattlesnake would scorn to live.

Are we frightened? Are we packing those spiritual suitcases? Are we making our peace with God and our fellow men? I see very little evidence of it. Young people, for instance, go right on having children, more and more children. Everybody is busy about his affairs. He drives to the office, she drives to the supermarket; they both ride in the subway. The children go to school five days a week and exhibit astonishing energy at home on Saturday and Sunday. There is a certain increase in churchgoing, but not as much as one would think. As I write, in the fall of 1959, eighteen plays are running on Broadway. Three of them might be classed as serious plays; they are *JB,* Mr. MacLeish's moving play about Job; *A Raisin in the Sun,* Lorraine Hansberry's perceptive play about Negroes; and *Sweet Bird of Youth,* Tennessee William's decadent play about decadent people. Five of the remainder are comedies; ten are musicals. In the small

Connecticut town nearest us the summer playhouse has just closed. The season was very mixed, the plays chosen showed great variety, but the most successful of the eleven were light comedies, with the honorable exception of *The Diary of Anne Frank,* which ran fourth on the list. What books do we read? In books we do a little better. Again as I write the ten best sellers on the novel list include *Exodus, The Ugly American, Lady Chatterly's Lover, Dr. Zhivago, Advise and Consent,* and *Lolita,* all of which were written with a serious purpose and certain of which deal with some of the problems of our time.

The whole field of mass entertainment, television, the radio, magazines, most newspapers, the movies, is probably well over 90 per cent devoted to taking its audience's collective mind off its troubles. Pretty girls with plenty of bosom and leg, music with a decided beat, make-believe heroes on the police force and the Western plains, "young marrieds" with tiny problems which they tinily solve, jokes about mothers-in-law, gifts of mechanical refrigerators for folks in financial straits, inside stories about movie stars or popular singers—90 per cent is certainly not an exaggeration. There is one Edward R. Murrow, not working as I write, although he is expected back before long; there are a handful of first-rate newsmen, and a few, a pitiful few earnest writers and producers who are ducking in and out between the spectaculars and the advertisements, trying to write something serious and meaningful or to act in it or direct or produce it. The advertisers, on the whole, are not amused, not interested.

They say the sale of Krispy Krunchies goes down during such programs. So this little group of serious artists is barely tolerated and every season another of their shows or their stories is sunk without a trace.

No, we are not thinking very seriously about the Day of Judgment. The most curious aspect of our life is our attitude toward civilian defense. One would think that every man, woman, and child would be conscious of civilian defense every hour of the day, would be building shelters against those terrible bombs, would be storing up food and water in lead boxes, and doing whatever else could be done to avoid complete disaster. Nothing of the sort is taking place. Nobody—literally almost nobody—can get interested in civilian defense; even our Government evidently does not take it seriously. If it did, the President would make it a crusade, the Congress would pass laws and appropriate billions of dollars. What for? Why just to keep you and me alive, with our skins whole and unblistered, and able to stay alive while the frightful cloud of death and destruction passes away over our entombed heads.

I have heard any number of times the easy answer to this perplexing lack of concern, if that is what it is. I have given this answer myself. "If one of those things goes off, I want to be dead quick and not know anything about it." That is certainly one way of looking at it and it is an entirely sensible point of view. The suffering of the survivors, both physical and mental, would be too dreadful; the death of our race or our city, if our planet somehow

survived, would be nothing we should want to see. Even for the sake of being alive.

This, I think, is not the whole story. In December 999, I suspect, there were some hardy souls who were perfectly willing to take over your castle or your woolen robe or your bast shoes or your iron pot if you were willing to give any of them away free for nothing. And that awaited calamity was nebulous, supernatural, scary because it was unknown, because the world was peopled with demons as everybody realized, but only a few people had really seen a demon plain. In our time we have made enormous improvements in our calamity. We know what it is made of, we know—some of us know with great particularity—what it will do to us and how it will do it. These knowing persons from time to time try to tell us but we do not listen; we cannot bear to listen. Is it because the calamity is too vast, too comprehensive, too final?

I am not sure. I think it may be also—and I say this with my fingers crossed because in some ways I am very superstitious and do not believe in arousing sleeping devils—I think it may be that we do not really and truly believe it. There will be some way out; governments are not so mad as to destroy themselves. Our Government certainly would not and Those Other People are human, too; they have that much sense, although we read uneasily of 650,000,000 Chinese, half of whom could perfectly well be sacrificed to gain control of the world in an atomic war. Yet even the Chinese—after all, they are one of the oldest

and most civilized peoples on earth. No, really; not even the Chinese!

I raised this question the other night with a group of people. "Do we believe it?" I asked. "Are we afraid? If we are, why don't we act as if we were?"

"To me," one of the men said, "the future is absolutely black. Not in my time, perhaps, but in fifty years, a hundred years, I believe the Chinese will overrun the world. They did it in the days of Ghengis Khan, they will do it again. Why not? Civilizations have disappeared before, nations have disappeared. The Greeks, who once ruled their world, have become a third-rate power, dependent on such protection as we can give them. The Romans, as an imperial entity to be respected and feared everywhere, no longer exist. Alexander the Great, Rameses the Great, all the other greats, they are names in the history book."

"But they *are* names in the history book," a young woman said. "We know something about their history. Our history is a continuation of theirs. Will there come a time when all of man's history as we know it now will be wiped out?"

"Probably," the first speaker said. "Let me ask you this. Even if there were no violent interruption of our world, even if what you call our history kept on going, can you imagine, a million years from now, a list of heads of state with the names of Macmillan and Eisenhower and Khrushchev and Franco on it?"

I admit I cannot imagine it. I suppose he was saying that change will come no matter what we do. I cannot

imagine anything at all about such monumental changes, such eras of time. Our little day—man's little day on this planet—has been so short; the universe is so vast. There are so many suns and groups of suns, of which our life-giving sun may well be one of the smallest. Looked at in that way, the future of mankind does not much matter. The cosmic pattern may contain man as a small thread in the warp or the woof. If the thread breaks, the fabric will still grow on the loom of eternity.

All this may be. It is not, somehow, very comforting. I should like the only world I know about, our world, to continue. I should like to believe that my grandchildren would grow up and go about their business and learn to know about familiar plants and animals and familiar books and music and painting, about the marvels of science, becoming more marvelous each year; and about love and trust and honor and generosity and neighborliness and love again. Our little world and Man in it, the quintessence of dust to be sure, is often mean and nasty and cruel. Yet only Man knows about Angels. Of all the animals, only Man has invented a creature which in his best moments he strives to be. There may be other planets on which creatures like ourselves, or better than ourselves, carry on their lives much as we do. They may have their own poets whose names we should not recognize; their own language would be strange to us; they may even have their own make of electric refrigerators. I do not ever expect to make their acquaintance. I am not going to worry about light years of distance or a million years

of time. A hundred years, that is something else again. I shall not be here, but I hope I should be able to talk easily to the people who are. I hope they will be people.

This is something, this anxiety lest our planet as we know it may disappear, which I believe did not frighten the men and women of December 999. This is our own special anxiety.

Most of us live with this anxiety every hour of the day. Perhaps it is natural enough that we make ourselves forget it most of the time, by whatever methods of forgetfulness we prefer. What a blessed morning it would be if we could one day wake up and know for a certainty that the need for such anxiety was past.

Man being the creature he is, that will doubtless be the morning of the Resurrection.

16

Spare the Rod

THE American Federation of Teachers, convening in Minneapolis, recently put itself on record as opposing state laws that prohibit teachers from using force in dealing with recalcitrant pupils. In various localities such permission is given teachers; in New York State a law was passed to this effect, only to be vetoed by the Governor.

So far as I know, no weapons have been indicated in this battle, although a Boston delegate to the teachers convention was quoted as saying he and his colleagues "believe in the use of the psychology book—as long as it is applied low enough, hard enough, and often enough." Our sixth-grade teacher, many years ago, used to chase the bad boys with a ruler. She never caught one, and she was, in those benighted days, considered by other teach-

ers and certainly by her pupils a failure as a disciplinarian. "She can't make us behave," we said, "so she yells and chases us. Miss B. doesn't need to do that." Miss B. was the fifth-grade teacher next door. Once Miss B. was obliged to leave the room and in her absence all sorts of obstreperous activities broke out. Suddenly she was in the doorway, standing there with her arms folded, looking at us. Just standing there. She didn't say a word; but we slunk to our seats as if pursued by the cat-o'-nine-tails itself. No, Miss B. had no need of a ruler. She had that mysterious thing called authority; and every pupil knew it.

When my children were small I was opposed to corporal punishment. But, as Bernard Shaw says, never strike a child except in anger; so one time when my older son was naughty I smacked him. He smacked me back. This seemed to me eminently reasonable and although I had been annoyed with him, my anger was suddenly gone. I was, after all, much bigger than he was. I did not smack him any more. My other son could be exasperating beyond belief, or so I thought at the time. Two or three times I spanked him, as hard as I could and for as long as my arm held out. At the end of the spanking we were exactly where we had started. He still stubbornly persisted in doing whatever I was trying to make him stop doing, or vice versa. I decided that discipline had to be carried on in some other way.

Consider the possible scene in the classroom. The pupil is being fractious. He will not sit down when he is ordered

to. The teacher—I visualize her as middle-aged, dark-browed, and weighing about 160 pounds—advances toward him. The pupil is fourteen and big for his age, hostile and probably mean. He absolutely refuses to sit down. What happens? Under the protection of the law does the teacher hit him a right to the jaw with her fist? Does she smack him on the side of the head with her attendance book—or her psychology book if it is handy? Does she seize him by the neck (having recently taken a couple of lessons in judo), and bending him across her knee, warm his bottom with the ever-present ruler? At fourteen, if he is not already on the way to becoming a juvenile delinquent, this public humiliation ought to start him off nicely. What if he has taken lessons in judo too? Could he and the teacher engage in a wrestling match right there in the classroom, with the other pupils making book on the result?

I cannot think of anything more contemptible than the possibility of such a performance. We have learned that the thumbscrew and the rack are not the best way to turn a sinner to God. We have even learned that animals can be trained more readily after rewards than after punishment. Is it possible that we are going back to teaching the adolescent human donkey with a stick instead of a carrot?

I am told that problems of discipline in certain city schools are grave indeed. Parents have no authority over their children before they come to school. Teachers can make no impression on their pupils. They do not want to

learn, there is nothing in school which interests them, they misbehave because they are bored and restless and maladjusted (that term which covers everybody's shortcomings). If the teacher cannot make them be quiet in any other way, he must use force. The law in some areas says he can.

I remember years ago when certain progressive methods were being tried out in a particular New York public school. The school was situated in what is now called a "depressed" neighborhood but was then called a slum. The children were nearly all "problems," even the little ones. In one fourth-grade class cartons of milk were sold to the pupils for a penny every morning. "Let them manage the milk business themselves," the innovator said. The school authorities were horrified. The children were not old enough, they would not be competent to carry in the cartons, they would spill them or throw them about, they would certainly steal the money. But the experiment was tried and not only was it a success but the general manners of the class improved enormously. They had a job, they were being given responsibility; they were doing something real that was engaging all their attention. They did not have time to misbehave; they had something better to do. Incidentally, of course, they learned a bit of arithmetic. If you have thirty cartons of milk you must have thirty pennies to show for them. Otherwise you cannot stay in business.

The school my children attended up to the age of thirteen was and still is based on the idea of the job. The

seven-year-olds run the post office, delivering the mail to other classes every morning. To do this they must be able to read the addresses and they cannot fail to learn a good deal about the school building. The eight-year-olds manage the store, buying supplies for the whole school from a wholesaler, calculating how much they must be sold to the other classes for, keeping accounts, making the books balance. I have always been envious because I did not learn arithmetic in so fascinating a manner. Older classes operate the school printing press or act as baby tenders for the littlest ones or perform some other necessary and important task; important because necessary. The processes of education—reading, writing, ciphering—go on all the time, but they go on in combination with responsibility. When I was a child, school was a place I had to go to five days a week from nine to three; the rest of the time I lived my life. In the school my children went to, and where they expect to send their children, they live all the time, passionately, eagerly, longing for more.

I will not say that discipline is never a problem in this school. I am sure it is. I am equally sure that when it is, the rod is not considered a proper or even a possible solution.

My husband lately retired after nearly forty years as a college professor. Many of his colleagues, various outsiders who attended his classes from time to time, and most particularly his students over the years seem to agree that he is a great teacher. During the year when his retirement was announced, he received letters from stu-

dents all over the country saying in effect, ten years ago or twenty you gave me certain things to think about and I have been thinking about them ever since. Attempts were made to put into words his quality, the reason for his success as a teacher. He himself insists that whatever success he may have had resulted from his constant preoccupation with his subject. He did not think about himself, he says, he did not even think about his students; he thought about his subject, all the time, without exception. This must certainly be part of the explanation. Other people say it is his personality; he is the kind of man students love, trust, and learn from. He resists this as too easy an explanation. I myself have my own reason.

When I first knew him, he was about to begin his career as a teacher. He had only recently completed his work for a doctor's degree. He had, as he was expected to do, familiarized himself with the various periods of English and American literature. I did not know him in those days of preparation for his doctorate, but I am quite sure on the basis of what I saw later that he spent long hours and late hours reading the books he was supposed to read with a few extra thrown in for good measure and thinking seriously and carefully about what he read. Soon after he began teaching he took over the course in Shakespeare. This was not the ordinary Shakespeare course as he taught it, the "most important" plays, with various commentaries on the theater of the time and the Elizabethans in general. Not at all. This was a course in Shakespeare, all thirty-seven plays and all the nondramatic poems, all

that Shakespeare wrote and nothing that he did not write. A thorough course, an extraordinary amount of reading for one year; but not too tough for the teacher, who read every word, too, and evidently not too tough for the students who came to it in large numbers. The teacher was educating himself in his subject at the same time he was teaching it. He taught it for fifteen years, not from notes, but from an annual rereading of the plays themselves, and every time he read them he said he found something new and wonderful that he had never seen before.

So it was with subsequent courses that he gave, in English poetry, in what he called The Narrative Art, in comedy and tragedy, and many others. Each one represented, and this I saw from personal observation, uncounted hours of hard work, late hours, thinking about what he read, talking about it, making it a part of his life and experience as it was to become a part of the students' life and experience.

Later it was the same with the great books. He truly felt, as he has often said, that the authors of those books were his friends. Plato and Aristotle, the Greek dramatists and historians, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Cervantes—I cannot begin to name them but he knew and knows them all. When we went to Greece a few years ago, he not only had the Greek myths and stories at his finger tips, he was able to write an article about Greece on the ship coming home, without a reference book of any kind, because he knew the subject so well.

Knowing the subject, yes. Personality, yes, probably. Hard work, too, hard thinking, constant application, unremitting devotion to the best ideas that men have had over the centuries. This, in my opinion, is one of the chief things that made my husband a good teacher.

I trust I have not labored this bit of family history unduly. What I am getting to is that being a teacher is not easy, but it is one of the finest things a person can try to be. It is even more important in some ways than being a parent, because a parent is partly accidental and he is concerned with food and shelter and manners and tidying up and will you ever learn to hang your jacket on the hook instead of on the floor. A teacher is concerned almost wholly with that part of man which distinguishes him from the other mammals—his mind. A teacher is not put into a classroom to keep the children off the streets, to make them sit still while they are being talked at, but to open to them certain doors, to hand them certain tools, to accustom them to certain habits. The first door is the entrance to the glorious world of reading. What cannot a man do who can read! Is it any wonder that welfare workers have discovered a definite correlation between juvenile delinquency and reading deficiency? The boy who cannot read easily or perhaps not at all must all too often work things out like this: Those other guys can read, everybody acts as if reading were so important. I'll show them I'm as good as they are; I'll steal a little or upset ash cans or break windows. When I get big I'll be the head of a gang and maybe steal a car!

The tools the teacher offers are reading, writing, calculating. A little child, tongue thrust out of the corner of his mouth, pencil gripped hard in his fist, has as great a sense of accomplishment when he has successfully written his first word as he will later have if he writes a book. What marvels can be performed with numbers, not only multiplying and dividing them, but breaking them into fractions and doing tricks with them by substituting for ordinary one, two, and three the mysteries of X and Y.

Finally the habits. Not only those of cleanliness, order, and consideration for others, although these are important in the schoolroom as they are at home. But the habit of thinking. You have just read a paragraph. Stop and look at it. Is it true? Do you believe it? If not, why don't you? What would make it more believable? And so on.

There is no end to the wonders of learning. They begin on the day of our birth and they go on, whether we will it or not, to the day of our death. They go on, even though we are not aware of them. How much better to be aware of them. To make others aware of them is to be a teacher; to be ourselves aware of them is to be a pupil. Both are the components of education.

Some such thoughts as these occurred to me when I read of the reintroduction of corporal punishment in certain schools. If the teacher were really a person, with respect and liking for his pupils; if he were willing to learn from them as they from him; if he knew his subject because he had worked hard at it, knew it from all angles, in and out, with side lines which made it all the more in-

teresting; if he had truly and often thought about it, deeply, sincerely, explicitly, if he were all this and had done all this, how could he possibly need to enforce his instruction with a stick?

17

What Do You Know?

If you learn a new thing every day, by the time you reach eighty you should know a lot. The new thing I learned today is that in a good many schools in our country "driver training" is part of the curriculum. It is obvious that a very large percentage of present-day school children are going to need, want, or be forced to drive a car. We live in a motor age and even urbanites own cars, drive cars, or rent cars which they must drive. I simply wonder if the school is the place to teach driving.

It takes me back to my own elementary-school training. I had about as average an education as it was possible to get in the early years of this century: public elementary school, public high school, and a state scholarship which made it possible for me to attend a first-rate woman's college. Although I started in the third grade and skipped

the fourth, I remember a good deal that I learned in elementary school. For one thing, grammar. There is a large body of educators today who do not believe in teaching grammar at all; and a larger body which thinks it should not be taught until the seventh grade. The theory of the first group is that English is a slippery sort of language that keeps changing overnight and everybody speaks it differently anyway, so why learn a lot of rules that may not apply the day after tomorrow. I don't know the theory of the second group.

In Public School Number 3, we had a lot of grammar in the seventh grade but it was a review of what we had been learning in lower grades. I can't remember the seventh-grade teacher's name, but she was tall and hollow-chested and blondish, with a nice smile. She always managed to save five minutes before the lunch bell rang; then she would smile at us over her glasses and say, "Now, we've got just a few minutes, so let's——" and we would groan and finish it for her—"spelling rules!" Indeed, yes, spelling rules, every day; when to use *ed,* when to use *ies* instead of *ys,* and so on. We knew them upside down and backward but we had to say them in unison anyway; after we had run through about two minutes' worth, she would write a sentence on the board and call on a pupil to parse and diagram it. The pupil did, too.

No, we don't parse and diagram any more. Diagramming went out with hoop skirts or shortly thereafter. Don't tell me, I know it too well. But I can diagram any sentence I can read and I know what the parts of speech

are (if the names are the same today, which they probably aren't), and I can parse. I am also able to distinguish literate from illiterate speech and writing; if I write a sentence with a subject but no predicate or make some other ungrammatical statement it is because I choose to and not because I don't know any better. This is more than can be said for many, many educated persons today who escaped grammar, probably into driver training.

We also had geography in my elementary school: the names of countries and where they were on the map, the capital cities and chief ports, the rivers, mountains, and even the products. It was learning by rote, of course; horrid thought. Don't let's learn by rote. It might do something to our minds. We had history in our school, too, American history, and a half year of Civics, pretty dull but useful to prospective voters, which I was although I didn't know it at the time. Lots of schools have given up geography and history and Civics; instead they have "Social Studies," emphasizing "the study of contemporary problems of individual, group, and intergroup living." If you are so benighted as to believe that contemporary problems have no meaning except in relation to the past, you are a silly old dunderhead and worse than that, you very likely believe in teaching children to read, write, and figure before they learn something called family relationships.

We learned poetry by heart in our school: a good bit of *Julius Caesar* and of *Macbeth,* some lines of "The Vision of Sir Launfall," a little Tennyson and Longfellow, and

the like. I had learned most of these when I was eleven years old and I remember them still. By the time I got to college it was much more difficult for me to learn poetry by heart and what I learned then I do not remember; but "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" is clear in my memory. I am not sure I understood it perfectly when I was eleven, but the fact that I learned it by heart then and did not forget it meant that as I grew older it took on more and more meaning. I think I really understand it now.

Nobody stopped to inquire whether *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth* was suitable reading matter for eleven-year-olds, whether their "experience of life" would permit them to understand these works. The theory behind their being offered to seventh graders was probably that they were classics, children could hardly become acquainted with the classics too early, and besides they were wonderfully interesting. Eleven-year-olds today read the newspapers; it is possible that the story of an ambitious politician whom a group of serious and responsible persons decided to cut down to size, or another ambitious politician who determined he would rise in the world even if it meant committing murder to do it, it is possible, I say, that either of these stories would have a familiar ring to a newspaper-reading eleven-year-old.

We had a spot of German in our elementary school; not enough of course, but by the time I came to the study of German in college I was familiar with a few words, a few constructions, and with the sound of it. I rather won-

der why German was offered instead of French; at least German is all I had, and I remember a round little man who began our first lesson by telling us we already knew German, and then he gave us sentences—*Die Sommer ist warm, der Winter ist kalt, mein Vater ist hier, Peter ist mein Bruder,* and to our surprise and delight we did know German after all. A little.

All this took place at Public School Number 3 nearly fifty years ago, and soon after I left things began to change. Here and there a touch of behaviorism, or a tinge of what was then called progressive education: the notion that school ought to be a place where children liked to go instead of a prison in which they spent five or six hours of every day became popular. I think there is much that is good in what I understand by progressive education; and the notion that school ought to be an agreeable place seems perfectly reasonable. The trouble with schools today, as I am only beginning to find out, is that the idea that "school can be fun" or "mathematics can be fun" or "learning to read can be fun" is threatening to drive out the other notion, which seems to me indispensable, that school is a place where certain basic skills must be learned; that these basic skills are reading, writing, and figuring—no fooling, they must be learned!; that in addition the school should teach the child something of his own cultural heritage, the history of his country, its place in the world, not only today but in earlier days; that the child should become acquainted with some of the great writers of other days, not contemporary writers

for teen-agers, not writers who discuss "the problems of our times," but writers who wrote the great poetry, the great stories, beginning with Homer and Shakespeare and proceeding forward; and finally that by exposing the child to great ideas and great literature, and by insisting that he perform capably the skills needed to live in the world, it is all too likely he will recognize that living in a group demands certain concessions to the group in manners, consideration, justice, and charity. If the child does not learn this final lesson, then the school should make a special effort to teach it, but the other matters, the skills, the ideas, the ability to think, the disciplinary process of knowing, all these, I believe, should come first.

Even a short while ago, this point of view would have been derided by a great many educators, so fast has progressive education overwhelmed us all, and would have been considered interesting but hopeless by many others, not only educators, but parents whose children were caught in the web of family counseling, child guidance, and intergroup living. However, for the benefit of those who have been dismayed by what has happened to American schools, I can tell them that here and there over the country a ray of light is breaking through. In this state or that city, more and more every year, there is a courageous Superintendent of Schools or a vigorous School Board or an energetic Principal with a devoted staff who is willing to buck the tide and insist on less progress and more education. Where this has happened, the public support has been surprising. Parents have long

been restless and dissatisfied; their children went to school but it didn't seem to help much. The other day in a little restaurant where we stopped for coffee, two old men were talking. "They want another school," the first one said. "Sure," said the second. "Another school. Schools, schools, schools, and none of them any good; they don't teach anything!"

It will not be easy to go back to real education. The intrenched teachers colleges of the country prefer things as they are. The intrenched textbook industry does, too. If your school should try to break away from driver training and go back to teaching grammar, you may find that the existing textbooks will not help you. You may have to write your own. If you want to start the third grade with half an hour a day of French, you may have to omit the Christmas Pageant and the Spring Festival. Whatever you decide to do can be done if you stick to it, be reasonable but firm, get the support of school officials, teachers, and parents all working together. You will, if you keep working, get the school you want; whether it is better or worse than the one you had before depends on you.

In fairness to the schools of today, I must admit that in my discussion I have telescoped somewhat the elementary school and the high school. Lower schools do not have courses in driver training; but they do have guidance and national norms and multiple-choice examinations, the latter permitting the machine to make the choices that our teachers used to make. I have seen some

of those multiple-choice tests, and I have often found that with a little ingenuity and a little extra knowledge of the subject you could easily find two or three best choices instead of one. Miss Univac, our teacher, will find only one; Miss Univac knows the absolutely right answers and she marks the papers, too, bless her metallic heart, thus freeing the flesh-and-blood teacher of this duty and giving her more time to answer all the multiple-choice problems that confront her every day.

Miss Univac; and audio-visual aids; and movies; and arithmetic games to show that arithmetic can be fun, and group conferences to learn about life and love—yes, indeed, love and marriage, too; all these are part of the new curriculum.

When I was a pupil in Public School Number 3 the biggest excitement we had was a Spelling Bee and that occurred only a couple of times a term. But of course back in those days going to school was work. We said we did not like it and perhaps we did not. I can believe that even then we had a sense of accomplishment; I certainly have it now. I am convinced that I learned something. Oddly enough, that seems to me the school's chief reason for being.

18

Heaven's First Law

I MUST have been about nine years old when I first began to "straighten up." My mother believed thoroughly in cleanliness, but she was likely not to put things away—little things, like yesterday's letter or the veil she had just taken off or the sewing kit she had opened to sew on one of my buttons. These and similar objects lay around on the bureau top until they made quite a pile and one day my father came home and referred to them in a slighting manner. Sniffing a little, my mother immediately put the bureau top to rights and, foolishly perhaps, indicated that she had done so. "Yes, it's neat now," my father said, "but how long will it stay that way?"

After that, I took over the business of keeping order. Perhaps I wanted to protect my mother; perhaps it was to please my father. In either case, when I came home

from school I put away the objects that had accumulated in the wrong places during the day; I dusted the furniture, even the rungs of the chairs which I hated to dust then and still do; I carpet-swept the rug. My father did not openly admire me for this but I think he liked it; my mother called me Papa's little housekeeper, with a certain wryness in her tone. After a while my mother got a job in an office and went out every day. The depression of 1907–10 was on and my father couldn't find any job at all. So on Saturday mornings, when I was home, my father and I cleaned the kitchen together, making a great thing of it, moving the stove, scouring behind it, using a wire brush on the burners, polishing the window and the floor, and so on. It was fun.

Whether or not this was the cause, the fact is that I am a straightener-upper; I put things away. I do not mean to boast. Other female members of my family scrub more thoroughly, use hotter soapsuds, sweep the floor oftener, and in general occupy themselves more assiduously with house-cleaning than I do. But I am neat. I have been chided about this from time to time, chided and laughed at and gently scorned. If you get up from the sofa, it is said that I am likely to shake up the pillows before you are out of the room; I put the main-course dishes in the dishwasher before I serve the dessert; I hang the towels straight on the bathroom racks. I hate to see dead flowers in vases or too many ashes in the ash trays or fresh-cut grass tracked in on the kitchen floor. I realize that these things do not really matter but they bother

me; and rather than be bothered too long, I put them to rights.

When my children were small they showed no sign of imitating this trait. They were disorderly small boys and hung their coats in the closet and put away their toys only with a good deal of urging from me and particularly from our old Martha, who, as she said only too often, wore herself out trying to make them into little gentlemen. Somewhere, however, along the years they began to learn. Only last summer, when my younger son with his family moved into the house that had been newly remodeled for them, he spent many hours fixing up the little tool house and woodshed back of the kitchen. There are shelves for canned goods, a cupboard for spices, hooks for tools; the broom, the dustpan, the whiskbroom, the mop each has its separate nail and—more than that—really hangs on it. A more shipshape spot it would be hard to find.

Yet when he was seven he habitually hung his sweater on the floor and lost his book under a chair.

Several years ago my husband and I visited a young friend and his wife and sons. They lived in a commodious country house of the vintage of 1890 perhaps, an ugly house but everybody had his own room, even the wife had her own room where she did the family accounts and what not. We saw her room; the bed was not made, papers were strewn about the floor, the chairs were covered with more papers, books, old clothes, and three sneakers. She apologized vaguely; the boys would not

let us see their rooms—too messy, they said. I washed dishes after supper; since the water was hot and the soap strong I preferred to wash rather than dry them; the boys did that, with half a dozen dish towels that had been hanging on a string behind the stove. The dish towels were at the very least tattle-tale gray.

On the way home I said: "I know I'm a fussbudget but I couldn't live that way." "Thank God you are," my husband answered. "I couldn't either."

I have always thought it would be nice to be a duchess. Not one of these modern duchesses who, because taxes are so high and nobody wants to be a servant any more even at those big wages, washes the dishes in the butler's (God rest his loyal soul, he was Gerald's father's batman at Mafeking and it's better he didn't live to see this day) pantry, while the duke dries them. Not that kind of duchess. I should like to be an old-fashioned duchess, with a live butler, a coachman and footman, and a personal maid. It would be nice to have a Tweeny, too, that poor little soul who was neither fish nor fowl but was created by God no doubt to run everybody's errands, even the second housemaid's. I know just how it would be. I should come in from a drive in the country, perhaps to pay a call on a couple of other duchesses or leave a basket or two for the poor. It would be time to change for tea, so I should lean this way and that while the personal maid unhooked or unbuttoned me, and then I should step out of my clothes daintily without a glance in their direction. If I felt playful, I might even walk on them.

The maid would do up my hair, button and hook me into fresh garments, and off I should go to tea and crumpets. The same sort of thing would happen an hour or two later when it came time to dress for dinner. This time I am sure I would deliberately step on that plum-colored shot silk; I always disliked it. The point is that although I should be leaving my dressing room in a great state of disarray, with underclothes on the floor and shot-silk afternoon gowns showing the mark of my dainty foot, I should never even know it. That is the big thing about being an old-fashioned duchess. You never see the disorder you create. You know there will be somebody to clean it up—provided you consider the matter at all—just as Queen Victoria is reported never to have looked behind her when she wanted to sit down. She was confident that a chair would be there.

The new duchesses may be quite as disorderly; but when they come back from tea the room looks the same as it did when they left it. Sighing, they hang up the modern-day equivalent of the shot silk and put the underwear in the hamper. Unless they decide to forget the whole thing and not change for God's sake, because after all we'll have to wash up after dinner.

Not being a duchess, old or new, my situation is altogether different. When I change my clothes I hang up the ones I have just taken off, hang them on a hanger in a certain order in my clothes closet. I do this because I hate to see clothes lying about on chairs and certainly not on the floor, where I would not step on them for anything.

I like to see my room in order. I never expect anyone to order it for me. So far am I from the noble state which I have tried to describe.

My husband is orderly, too. Except for one thing. There is a red chest in the hall of our house in the country; in the chest I keep sweaters and scarves and gloves and similar odds and ends. At the other end of the hall is a perfectly good closet with plenty of hooks and hangers; it is for coats. When my husband comes indoors, being a neat man, you might expect him to hang his jacket and cap in the closet. He does, in fact, hang up his city coat and city hat. His country coat, no; this he throws on top of the red chest; if he should happen to want a heavier or lighter jacket he will eventually throw that on the chest, too, so that every few days I sort out the pile of coats and caps on the chest and hang them away, grumbling as I do so: "You never hang up your country coats, do you?" "No," he answers.

Nevertheless, hanging up things is faintly lower class and I am aware of it when we spend the night with friends who still have chambermaids. I unpack my suitcase and then remember that the maid will expect to do it for me; so I hastily put a few things back to show that I know what good manners are. When we come back from a walk before dinner, I find my things neatly stowed away in the bureau drawers or hung on padded hangers in the closet; my slippers are put side by side by the bed and my dressing gown is draped carefully along the foot of it. I know without looking that I will find my night-

gown perfectly folded underneath my pillow. Ho hum for the life of a duchess (old-fashioned).

I couldn't stand to have a maid doing my hair, I must admit. My hair has its own peculiarities and I am the only one who understands them. Recently one of my daughters-in-law, who has beautiful thick, curly hair, decided to help my thinner, straighter locks by lending me her curlers (she uses them to keep her curls in order, not to make them). They were little wire cylinders with a brush inside, and she wrapped strands of my hair around each one and pinned me up so that I looked like Medusa with her snakes at rest for the night. She had to leave at that point but she told me how to unwind the curlers and I am sure I followed her directions, at least at first. I carefully unwound and unwound, but my hair would not come away from the wire and the brush. I pulled and tugged and coaxed and separated strand from strand. After half an hour, having pulled out quantities of hair that I can ill spare, I had all the curlers off but one; that one I finally cut off, leaving a chopped-off lock on the right side that will not catch up with the rest of my hair for many a day.

No, I could not abide a maid fussing with my hair. There is, however, one thing I should let her do and love it. She could open my bed and turn down the covers. In the old days of Martha, although she had a thousand things to do every day, once in a while when we were out for dinner she would turn down the beds. I could never count on it and I never dared indicate that I expected it of her; but it always gave me a feeling of luxury at least

as great, I am sure, as being able to step out of my clothing without a backward glance.

While I am on the subject, although it is a little removed from straightening up, I may as well confess that if I were an old-fashioned duchess I should have clean sheets and pillow cases on my bed every day of the year, alarming as this notion might be to certain duchesses I have read about. I was pleased when I read in Elizabeth Jenkins's admirable biography of Elizabeth the First that Her Majesty spent surprisingly large sums on towels and soap and that, contrary to the custom of the time, when washing was usually done out of a basin, she preferred to take a real bath in a real bathtub. How often she did this, her biographer does not say.

It is so much easier to take a bath today than it was in Queen Elizabeth's time. The bathroom is warm, the water is the temperature you like, the towels are fresh, the soap is mild and shaped to the hand. It is easy to take a bath—if you have the money. I remember it was a shock to me to discover, as I did at a rather early age, that the poor are often dirty because they cannot afford to buy soap. Yet even here that mysterious something which makes me plump up sofa cushions as soon as they are vacated works in the most unlikely places.

On one of our trips to the Middle West we went through a part of Arkansas. It was a raw, cold March morning and even in that comparatively southern part of the country frost was in the air; I remember people were worried about the peach blossoms freezing. We passed through

a region of Negro hovels, the worst habitations for humans that I have ever seen. These were the houses of farm workers, I learned, and their employers seemed to think them adequate. The buildings were set up on stilts some two feet high; they were made of vertical boards not fitted together tightly, so that large cracks let in the cold March wind. Most of the houses had no windows; the holes where windows had been were roughly boarded up. From a few chimneys a wisp of smoke could be seen. The ground to each doorstep—two steps usually to reach the door—was pounded bare and littered with the detritus of miserable living: a tin can, a sharp stick, a bit of rubber, a dirty rag. There was no sign of any of the amenities of life, either in the wretched houses or the sad little yards in front of them. Yet there was! As we drove along, past house after house just as I have described them, one suddenly stood out, like a jewel, like a bright bird, like a fresh pool in a desert. Around the yard someone had made a crude picket fence out of whatever boards were handy, but they had a semblance of matching, of evenness. There was a patch of grass, green and springlike. Off in one corner, to the left of the door, stood a gnarled lilac bush, putting out new leaves.

Someone in that house, perhaps a grandmother who remembered a better day, perhaps a young mother who wanted a happier life for her children, someone had not only the desire but the energy to transcend the squalor all around her. She—perhaps it was not only a woman; perhaps a man, too, who had built the fence—whoever it

was had created an oasis in the desolation of mean poverty that extended as far as the eye could see. Somebody had had the notion of fixing things up, because not to do so, not to make some such effort would have been altogether intolerable. It would have been a consolation, I think, to the fixer-upper if he could have known how much his effort lifted our spirits on that cold March day.

19

American Modern

About six years ago for our house in the country I bought a refrigerator and a gas stove. Now nightly in my prayers I hope that neither of them will ever wear out; I want to have them for the rest of my life.

Why is this? Aren't there millions of stoves and refrigerators, brand-new and shining from the pages of the magazine ads, not to mention warehouses full of them and the large appliance departments crammed? Aren't there? To this I can only answer, from considerable observation amounting almost to research, yes, there are stoves; yes, there are refrigerators. But not like my refrigerator; not like my stove. Bless their dear little white-enameled-on-steel, long-lasting, I hope, hearts. There are none like mine. They do not make them any more.

Shortly after I bought our stove and refrigerator, the

style changed. My refrigerator does not have shelves in the door. It was the last year they made the door solid like that, thick, a bona fide insulation for the box. My husband, a child at heart, wrung his hands when he saw he could not put the Coca-Cola bottles in the door shelves and the eggs in their little racks; he was horrified at no butter conditioner. If we want soft butter, we have to let it stand for a few minutes in the kitchen. The rest of the time, in the refrigerator, it is cold and hard as it should be. We keep the eggs in the carton supplied by the grocer; no time is wasted transferring them into little holes in the door. I like it this way. Moreover, I believe we use less electricity for better refrigeration.

My refrigerator does not have automatic defrosting and if there is one household task that I genuinely loathe, it is defrosting the refrigerator. Nevertheless, from what my friends with more up-to-date boxes tell me, automatic defrosting is not an unmixed blessing. Sometimes it works right and sometimes it doesn't. At the time I bought our box it was new and I thought I ought to wait until, as the phrase goes, the bugs were ironed out of the idea. I gather the bugs are still there. So every month or so I spend a dismal two hours packing the contents of the freezer in a vacuum container that is supposed to keep hot things hot and cold things cold; I wash the shelves and the inside walls; I put pans of hot water in the freezing compartment; eventually, when all the visible ice has fallen off in large lumps, I creep up the narrow space between the freezer and the wall with my hand and arm, coaxing

the hidden ice that still stubbornly clings to fall down; and when all is clean and empty inside, and the frozen packages are returned to their place, I look admiringly at my handiwork and draw a long breath of relief. I won't have to do that for a while.

If there were an automatic mechanism which would avoid this tiresome chore, I should be glad, but I am not sure there is. I am told that the automatic defrost, having melted the ice, causes it to freeze up again worse than ever; or it allows the ice cream to melt and then freezes it again, which we know is not good; or it makes a drip inside that is damp and mold-making. If you cite the advertisements which make large claims for automatic defrosting, I reply simply that on the whole I do not believe advertising claims. I remember the days when detergents were advertised as being kind to your hands, with pictures of lily-fingered housewives to prove it; and the subsequent ads for lotions to cure the redness and roughness of your hands caused by harsh detergents.

I am glad I do not, at the moment, have a refrigerator with automatic defrosting. I am not particularly enticed by boxes with revolving shelves. I hate the brittle, synthetic vegetable boxes and meat coolers inside the latest refrigerators. My box has good, honest porcelain-enamel containers for vegetables and fruit. They feel as though they would last. Oh, how I hope they will. I am sure that the plastic containers will crack as soon as they are dropped on the kitchen floor. I don't like the flimsy feel of them.

I do not like dull pink or sad blue in the inside of my refrigerator; I don't even want a navy-blue stripe around the edge. Neither pink or blue goes with my kitchen and I don't want a color that would blend with my colors because I may want to change the whole color scheme and I don't want the inside of the refrigerator to be a sour note. It is white and I like it white, inside and out. I know a woman who has a shiny black refrigerator. I should as soon have a hearse upended in the corner of the kitchen.

There was a time a year or so back when all sorts of kitchen utensils, from saucepans to dish drainers, were offered in pink. If you didn't like pink, and in the kitchen I certainly do not, you couldn't buy a pancake turner. They all had pink handles. At the moment pink seems to have gone out and I notice a good bit of yellow. But if my refrigerator had been bought during the pink craze, it would continue to blush madly at me every time I opened the door, even though the rest of the kitchen had long since been given over to yellow and red.

So I really love my refrigerator. It is a big, solid, substantial white box; it holds enough for our family; the shiny metal shelves, chrome-plated I suppose, show no sign of losing their shine. I have four (4) ice-cube trays, not two, as most of the modern boxes, no matter how large, seem to have. The door shuts with a deep, satisfying clunk. You have to open it with one hand, to be sure; but I am a little distrustful of the foot-opening doors. I am not secure enough on one foot to risk opening the door

with the other while I am holding a bowl of peas and a jar of gravy.

When it came time, a couple of years ago, for one of my daughters-in-law to furnish her kitchen, I said happily, "Go quick; get a refrigerator like mine. And a stove, too."

Of course she could not. The pink inside and the blue inside had come in; the plastic boxes were everywhere; the whole thing felt as substantial as a child's toy.

My kind of icebox isn't being made any more.

The situation with the stove is even worse. My stove, also white, has four burners on top, two at each side, with a space in the middle for warming plates; the area over each pilot light is just warm enough to keep chocolate or hollandaise sauce at the proper consistency; also the pan of minute rice that had been put in the boiling water. Also the plate of toast in the morning; on one pilot light the plate of toast, on the other my husband's bacon, keeping warm for him while he poaches the eggs.

The latest stoves have a griddle in the middle. There was a time when, like the refrigerators with pink insides, you couldn't buy a stove without a griddle, heavily advertised as ideal for making pancakes and frying eggs. These days we make pancakes not oftener than once a month, if that. I have a beautiful aluminum griddle which extends over two burners of the gas stove and makes eight pancakes at a time. What do I want with a griddle every day? Especially since I need the space for all the reasons outlined above. As for eggs, I am sure it is easier to wash a

frying pan in the sink than to clean the griddle on the top of the stove.

Worst of all are the changes that have been made with respect to the broiler. My stove has a capacious oven with a drawer under it; this is supposed to be used for heating plates, but it is too hot, so I don't use it. No matter. Alongside the oven I have a broiler. Not a narrow space about big enough to broil a small steak, which the very latest models of stoves have, along with a spit that would turn a roast big enough for four persons. No, I have a full-sized broiler, as large as the oven. I can bake something at a very low oven temperature and broil something at the highest broiler temperature, all at the same time. Nor do I have to get down on my knees to put the chops in to broil.

Stoves like mine aren't made any more.

While I am on the subject of stoves, I may as well admit that admirable as I consider my present stove to be, superior to all new-fangled, newly-styled stoves of this year or next, even it has a drawback. When we first bought a house in New York and a stove to go with it, the four burners were at one side, the oven next to it, elevated, the door waist high, the broiler slightly below. No stooping. Such a stove no longer exists. Some designer-engineer—I am afraid it was a man—decided that all the appliances in a kitchen must be the same height as the countertops, for looks, I suppose. The high oven, therefore, was definitely out. Let the women stoop down; who cares? The designer-engineer wasn't doing the cooking. We've got

to make the kitchen look right, everything level. Stooping is good for the waistline. Very recently, the wall oven has been introduced; this is comfortably high but it costs three or four times as much as a regular stove.

I remember a similar "improvement" on wood stoves. Our first stove had a shelf over the cooktop. You set the plates on it to warm. Earlier stoves had a snug little warming closet instead of a shelf. Not now, however. Now if you must have a coal-wood stove, and there isn't any stove in the world nicer to cook on, you must buy it with a flat top and a splash back. No shelf. Everything on a level, remember?

Why must we have so much change? We are reconciled to the business of our clothes changing shape, length, breadth, and thickness every year. Must stoves change, too? Actually, the dream of the designer-engineer is just that. If he could change, improve, modify, or otherwise ruin stoves every twelve months, and convince the giddy housewife that she absolutely had to have a new stove as her husband had to have a new car—makes sense, doesn't it?—the designer-engineer would die happy. Recently I thought about buying a rug. I was shown all the "new" rugs—nylon, rayon, and so on. No wool, I asked in my old-fashioned way? Yes, they had wool, but these new patterns and fabrics were so interesting, so modern . . . no, perhaps they would not wear as well as wool, but after all people were getting away from the notion that a rug ought to last half a lifetime. Why not change your rug every so often? Why buy a rug to pass on to your chil-

dren? Why not, I wanted to shout; but of course one must not shout. I merely murmured it gently as I made for the elevator.

This notion that things not only are not built to last but should not be permeates every aspect of our lives. Walk along Park Avenue in New York City between Forty-sixth and Ninetieth streets. The buildings are handsome, sturdy, expensive looking. Yet on nearly every block there is a building with a sign on it announcing that in a year or two a twelve- or twenty-story "modern" (I am beginning to hate that word) building will be erected on that site. In every block, almost, one of the modern structures already exists, high, glass-walled, excruciatingly *dernier cri.* Not one of the old buildings can have been built longer than fifty years ago; many of them are much younger than that. Yet they are doomed, sacrifices to our love of change. Ten to one the new buildings will be less well-built than the old. If you live in an old apartment house, it is pretty certain that the walls are thicker, the floors solider, the windows tighter, the plumbing more durable than in a brand-new building; not to mention the fact that the rooms are better proportioned. Cutting corners, using shoddy materials because we don't want the object to last, has long been standard practice in our industrial system. Change in the interest of being newly styled is all too often change for the worse.

As a final example in this diatribe against "modern," take matches: wooden matches, what I still call kitchen matches, although they have long since been promoted

from the kitchen, where there is no longer any need for them, to the parlor where they are first aid to the smoker. Wooden matches. They used to come in a double pasteboard box, the inside of which, containing the matches, slid out of the outside part, on which there was a bit of sandpaper to strike a light. They used to cost five cents a box, too, but that is beside the point; trees cost more these days. The old box of matches used to hold enough to fill six glass containers in the living room, with a good handful left over for the iron matchbox on the wall by the fireplace.

What has happened to kitchen matches? Why, they have got shorter and slenderer, the box has shrunk in size, at the same time that the price has doubled; even more than doubled if you are so foolish as to buy the boxes with colored pictures on them, instead of the plain —and cheaper—ones. Moreover, there are fewer matches in the box. I am sure that the manufacturer thought the housewife did not notice her matches were disappearing before her eyes; this housewife did. It is not enough that the matches are flimsier, so that the stick breaks almost if you touch it. Nowadays when I am filling my match containers from the box, there are not enough matches to go around. I have to use a box and a half, and the iron matchbox is still empty.

Even this decline of the match does not tell the whole story. The double sliding box has gone the way of all flesh. We now have a single box which opens at the top.

You have to dig down into it to get the matches out, or if you put it on its side the matches fall on the floor.

Alas for the days of the old matchbox and the old match. Like the five-cent cigar, the nickel subway fare, and the rugs bought to last a lifetime, we shall not see them any more.

I cannot believe I am the only curmudgeon who is opposed to these modern innovations. Some of my friends wear a coat for several years, as I do; a coat, mind you! A refrigerator ought to last a good deal longer. When a change is made, it ought to be a significant change, for an important reason; not merely a change in style. My mother recommended Pears Soap to me because her mother had recommended it to her; the shape, color, or smell of the soap had not changed; the style of the wrapper was the same. It is the same now. I see it in certain mail-order catalogues, although it cannot be a best seller. It is just the same old Pears Soap and the funny thing about it is that it is advertised as a particularly long-lasting soap. Perhaps this is because it is of British make. The British, I believe, like their soap and their shoes and their woolens and their houses to be made to last. In the United States we would rather have a new package than an old soap.

Or perhaps it is just the package designers who think so.

20

What's Cooking?

All sorts of menus have been devised, in all sorts of cookbooks, for every sort of occasion: Christmas and Thanksgiving, of course. If you feel traditional you have turkey and cranberry sauce; if you want to be original you have roast beef for Thanksgiving and fresh salmon for Christmas. A wonderful thing happened to a friend of ours in connection with roast beef—it was her choice for Christmas dinner. She had purchased the roast at the butcher patronized by her mother in New York City, had made a quick call on her mother and sister, and late in the morning of December 24 she started off on her drive to our town in Connecticut. When she got to the first toll station, at the head of the Henry Hudson Parkway, a traffic cop waved her to a stop. "Pull over!" he said sternly. "What have I done now?" she breathed. "Are you Mrs.

John Smith?" "Yes," she replied, feeling even more guilty. "And what are you going to have for Christmas dinner, Mrs. Smith?" "Why—why roast beef!" "Oh, no, you're not," the cop answered, "not unless you go back to the city and pick it up."

It was true. In her haste she had come off without her roast. Her mother had telephoned her husband in Connecticut; he with great presence of mind had called the New York Traffic Bureau which had alerted the Toll Station.

"I'm terribly sorry to have put you to so much trouble," said Mrs. Smith as she headed back to town.

"Lady," said the cop, "if you knew what a pleasure it is for us to do something like this instead of the sort of thing we usually have to do, you wouldn't talk about trouble."

So the Smiths had roast beef seasoned with the good will of the New York Police Force.

In our family we have pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving and pumpkin and mince for Christmas, now that I have learned to make an acceptable pie. Nobody likes plum pudding much except me, and I don't want to eat it all by myself. I have invented a way of preparing yellow turnips which my family approves of, and we have it sometimes on both feast days: yellow turnips mashed with a lot of butter, a teaspoon of dried basil, and a couple of eggs. The beauty of this dish is that you can prepare it the day before, put it in a casserole, and heat it up in the oven in time for the holiday dinner.

Then there are menus for birthdays. Our old Martha insisted that a birthday cake must be a white cake with white icing, and this we always had in spite of the fact that to a man we prefer chocolate. A birthday cake, Martha told us, had to be white. There are menus for Hallowe'en, with the emphasis on orange gelatin or pumpkin tarts; and menus for July 4, with the color scheme as close as the cook can make it to red, white, and blue—something like little beets from the garden, mashed potatoes, and blue delphinium for the centerpiece! All my cookbooks have menus for children's parties, invalids, persons on a reducing diet, persons who want to gain weight (lucky fellows!), salt-free, fat-free, and sugar-free menus, meatless and sweetless menus, and boiled and steamed menus for the ulcer-ridden.

Years ago my husband spent a summer as a hired hand on one of his father's farms. The farmer's wife served fried potatoes three times a day for the two months he stayed with her family. He had no doubt that she would continue to serve them at every meal for the balance of the year. Fortunately, he is very partial to fried potatoes.

For years I have been looking for a first edition of the *Boston Cooking School Cook Book* by Fanny Farmer, the date, I believe, being 1896, the year I was born. I have never found it, but I did turn up an even more ancient cookbook, Mrs. Lincoln's *Boston Cook Book*, published in 1883, and I understand that this was the same Boston Cooking School which Fanny Farmer later made so famous.

I was struck, in reading Mrs. Lincoln, by how much of the meat section was given over to game. Not only wild duck, goose, and venison, which are familiar, but grouse, woodcock, pigeons, quail, rabbit, and terrapin. "The potato," says our author, "is more generally used than any other vegetable." Alas, how are the mighty fallen. I sometimes let days go by without serving a single potato, even to the point when my husband says wistfully, "I don't suppose we could have raw fried potatoes for dinner, could we?" At the beginning of her book, Mrs. Lincoln has a couple of paragraphs on how to make a fire, after explaining that the materials generally used as fuel are wood, charcoal, coal, kerosene oil, and gas. Gas must have been the least usual because she says no more about it. Here are a few other thoughts from 1883: "Pork is an unwholesome meat, and should never be eaten by children, or people with weak digestion, nor, indeed, by anyone except in cold weather." "Much of the excellence of baked beans depends upon the bean pot. It should be earthen, with a narrow mouth and bulging sides. This shape is seldom found outside of New England [oh, the delightful complacency of Boston, as true now as it was then]. . . ." Diet for invalids may include flour or arrowroot gruel, milk porridge, barley gruel, farina gruel, cracker or egg gruel, oatmeal mush, and rice water or jelly. Ventilation is most important for the sickroom, and "a sunny exposure and an open fire, and in summer an open fireplace, are essential aids."

In her directions for dishwashing, Mrs. Lincoln makes

this dismal chore sound almost pleasant. "With a little care in observing these hints," she says after several pages of firm directions about how to clear the table and scrape and stack the dishes, "and always using clean, hot soapy water (and not a liquid fit only for the swill cart), changing it as soon as greasy, dishwashing would be robbed of half its terrors. And after work is done, if the hands be carefully washed with Castile soap, not with strong washing-soap, and wiped dry, no unpleasant effect upon the skin will be felt." Shades of our modern hand lotions, hand creams, skin foods, and the like. What if only good soap did the trick after all?

I cannot refrain from quoting, finally, Mrs. Lincoln's last paragraph on dishwashing: "These suggestions are given by one who has always liked to wash dishes, and who thinks it not beneath the dignity of any woman to learn to do such work in the very best manner, and that no apology is needed for acknowledging a taste for this much abused portion of domestic work."

Dear Mrs. Lincoln of Boston in 1883, I wonder what you would have thought about electric dishwashers.

With this long prelude, I should like to do a little special menu-making of my own. There is a menu, or a type of menu, for days when I feel like cooking; and a very different type for days when I do not.

Not long ago all of our children were to dine with us—unexpectedly. It was also a day when I had bought just enough for my husband and myself, or perhaps a little

more than enough. Zeal, therefore, had to be compounded with ingenuity.

I had a pound and a half of fresh scallops. Hm. Scallops and bacon—a lot of bacon? Possible. Creamed scallops with breadcrumbs, eked out with minced clams and a can of tuna? Not wildly exciting. Ha, I have it! Coquilles Saint-Jacques, and I'll use those beautiful shells the children brought me from the Virgin Islands.

I consulted the *Gourmet Cookbook*, in which the recipes are exclusively for the days when cooking should be as close to an art as possible. There is nothing simple about *Gourmet* recipes and nothing quick. For my Coquilles I simmered the scallops in white wine in one pan, and cooked the chopped mushrooms with onion (wrong of course, but I had no shallots) and seasoning in another; then in still another I made the *roux* (butter and flour to you and me), and so on and so on. After a while the scallops and mushrooms, chopped fine, were nestling in their sauce on their shells, covered with breadcrumbs, dotted with butter (why do the cookbooks always say dot with butter?), and were ready to be put under the broiler. They turned out very well, if I do say it, and our dear children, not to mention their father, were suitably impressed.

With this elaborate main dish I could have added a salad and some frozen peas and ended up with fresh fruit. Not at all—this was my cooking day. I went out to the garden and cut some fine broccoli heads, leaving them to soak in salty water for an hour or so; this, as Martha used

to say, is to kill the snakes, and indeed now and then a green worm, nicely pickled in salt brine, can be seen floating on top of the water. In a mad moment I made hollandaise sauce for the broccoli, from my favorite recipe in the *Herald Tribune Cook Book,* which can be made in the double boiler in advance and set over a warm place on the stove until needed. To prove that I was really a cook, I also made rolls—not, I hasten to add, real rolls from scratch, but a hot-roll mix which comes out very well, one of the few mixes I consider worthy of attention. Dessert? Here I stopped cooking. I had our own MacIntosh apples, decoratively red, and our own pears, I think they are Bartletts but anyway they have a rosy cheek and a fine flavor, plus some purple and some green grapes from the grocer. The basket of fruit looked very pretty and the children welcomed it after so much rich sauce.

After I had set the table, arranged the coffee tray with the pot ready to be plugged in, and prepared the tray for drinks, I felt as though I were really a cook.

Of course I am not. A friend of ours whose mother, in the old days, kept a cook, waitress, and chambermaid, and who now does her own chores, put one aspect of our present-day method of cooking very neatly. "Our old Lizzie had an easy life," she said. "Sure, she cooked; very fancy cooking, too; but one of the girls set the table and both of them waited, if we had guests; and she had help in preparing vegetables and washing dishes and she never went to market. She just cooked. I have to buy the food, prepare it, cut flowers for the table and fix them, do all

the preliminaries, have everything ready so I can have a drink with my guests, serve the dinner, and wash up after the company has gone home. It would have killed Lizzie; I'm not sure that someday it won't kill me."

On the days when I don't feel like cooking, I proceed very differently. If I ask my husband what he would like for dinner he makes one of two answers: macaroni and cheese or liver and bacon. Liver and bacon is a little easier. You put the bacon in the oven and forget about it and you cook the liver for three minutes or so before you sit down to the table. Liver and bacon, and perhaps frozen squash if it is the proper season or frozen spinach; possibly fresh asparagus but that means a trip to the garden and some preparation; a salad, and ice cream for dessert. No hot rolls, but I will go as far as toasted English muffins. Not a bad meal and not much work, although there is still the table to set, the coffee tray to prepare, and so on.

Mrs. Lincoln's *Boston Cook Book* does not have any specimen menus for ordinary or gala occasions, which is a pity. I have seen a cookbook only twenty years earlier than hers, mid-nineteenth century, that is, and the dinner menus are something to read, although surely not to eat. A twelve-course meal is about average, and a Lizzie with a couple of kitchen maids and a sauce chef would have been required to prepare it. I have, however, an edition of Fanny Farmer published in 1922. Here are some suggested menus, not for special occasions at all, but some

Wednesday or Thursday when the family decides that eating dinner would be a good idea:

> Cream of pea soup, boiled mutton, caper sauce, mashed potatoes, Turkish pilaf, graham pudding, fruit and nuts;
> Or vegetable soup, veal cutlets, horseradish, mashed potatoes, cream of lima beans, dressed celery, cerealine pudding [whatever that is, but it sounds starchy];
> Or duchess soup [made with flour, butter, milk, grated cheese, and vegetables], fried halibut filets, shredded potatoes, hot slaw, beefsteak pie, Irish Moss blancmange with vanilla wafers.

Had enough? I certainly have. I don't believe I'll want to eat again for a week. I feel, indeed, the way my husband and I do when, on rare occasions, we go out for Sunday lunch, which means Sunday dinner in the middle of the day. We get home about four, read the paper, take a little walk, followed by a nap. Around eight o'clock we have milk toast and a dish of applesauce.

Yet this series of menus I have quoted above is from a book less than forty years old. More than a generation, it is true, but how much eating habits have changed in that time. Potatoes and bread are no longer the staffs of life; note the emphasis on starch in the 1922 recipes. Frozen food has come to be a necessary part of our cookery. Not that I favor it very highly. Some frozen vegetables are not bad if you are in a hurry; frozen raspberries are quite good, frozen blueberries make a good pie but not any better than canned ones. The frozen dinners, complete with gravy and cranberry sauce, I can do without, thank

you. Some of the mixes are pretty fair, especially the brownie and the gingerbread mixes; but it is not really much trouble to make brownies or gingerbread or a real cake, and if you are any sort of cook, they will be better than a mix.

I refuse to consider short cuts like the use of canned creamed soup instead of cream sauce; if you top your dish with cornflakes I shall eat at the nearest diner.

These culinary horrors, promoted, I am sorry to say, in the big-circulation magazines and no doubt followed by certain women of weak character, are what is the matter with American restaurants and American cooking in general. Except for very costly restaurants in large cities, where the cooking is usually French, and an occasional restaurant in a small town which you happen on by accident and will probably never see again because you will not be driving that way (and indeed with the modern soporific thruways, even the small-town restaurant is no longer available), except for these honorable exceptions, American restaurant cookery is, in my opinion, deplorable.

Stop at any motel on your route. The beds are good, the floor is carpeted, the bathroom is glossily tiled and spotless; there is a restaurant nearby and what are you offered for dinner? Why fried chicken, of course; fried chicken, fried shrimps, and what is laughingly called steak, that is to say a limp, thin slab of steer meat, gray-brown on top, gray-brown in the middle. It is, no doubt about it, tough. The fried chicken is not really that at all; my Middle

Western relatives make fried chicken that melts in your mouth, calories and all. This restaurant fried chicken is hardly cooked, but it is wrapped in what I suspect is shirt cardboard covered with greasy breadcrumbs. The shrimps are covered with this, too, and they are as tough as the steak. With this delightful meal you have what is universally called "tossed salad." Now the idea of tossed salad is simply to distinguish the serving of salad greens with an oil and vinegar dressing from greens served dry on a plate with a gob of mayonnaise and a cherry on top. In so far as we can eliminate the mayonnaise and the cherry, well and good and I am thankful for it. It is a good idea to turn your greens around in your dressing so that every leaf is glistening with oil. This is all that tossed salad should mean. What it does mean in most restaurants is iceberg lettuce, that stepsister of a cabbage, cut up in pieces, chopped-up carrots and beets and maybe green pepper, all of it drenched with salad dressing out of a bottle and heavily laced with paprika. My husband's father liked his lettuce with sugar and vinegar. I don't care much for this myself, but I would take it any day in preference to tossed salad.

For dessert you have cardboard pie or synthetic ice cream.

It is no wonder, I suppose, that you see so many travelers in American restaurants subsisting on frankfurters with chili sauce or those paper-thin slices of chopped beef which go by the name of hamburgers and you'd better put a lot of catsup on them.

I hate to end on this sour note. There was a little restaurant we stopped at one night; it was called the Eagle's Nest and it was in the middle of Kentucky. We had steak, but although it was thin it was not dry and gray and it was tender; I don't remember what the vegetables were but they must have been palatable; every table had a pot of fresh honey on it to put on the hot rolls, which tasted homemade. For dessert we had a first-class pecan pie.

You could see it was a good restaurant, my husband said, because in the first place it was full, with more men than women, and the men were mostly eating with their hats on. I think this meant not that they were ill-mannered but that they simply couldn't wait to get at their food.

Incidentally, the Eagle's Nest was cheap. Why more such restaurants can't exist in this great, rich country of ours I shall never know. I only know that they are few and far between. Which is the real reason I have taken to cooking and can hardly be budged from the kitchen by the most urgent plea of "Let's eat out for a change."

21

Keep It Clean!

ALTHOUGH we sometimes think so, we Americans are not the only clean people in the world. I remember a hotel in Delphi, on a Greek mountainside; the mattress was two inches thick and as hard as the proverbial board, but the sheet was snowy white and smelled as if it had been dried in the open air. There was not a speck of dust anywhere in the room. And not only in Greece. We stopped at an English hotel in the Lake Country, near Windermere, I think it was. No rooms were vacant in the main house, which had been built some four centuries earlier; so we slept in what they called a chalet, but we should call it a cabin. This time the mattress was big and high and comfortable; there were four thick woolen blankets, soft, light wool, and the night was cool enough so that we used them all. Again everything was clean and fresh; there

was no plumbing but an old-fashioned washbowl and pitcher and we were shown the way to the outdoor privy. It, too, was clean.

One trouble with our cleanliness is that we so often make it ugly. The last time we stopped in a motel I looked around the adjoining restaurant where we were having breakfast. The walls were painted with apple-green enamel, highly glossed. Behind the counter at the end of the room a plastic-covered wall rose, streaky silver. The counter top was plastic, too, one of those compositions, peach-colored; naturally it was washable, no, it was wipe-off-able. A flick of the wrist and a damp rag would take care of it. The table tops, plastic, were dark green; the floor was black and white tile. The whole place was about as cosy as the new monkey cage at the zoo and like the monkey cage it was air-conditioned.

I remember a restaurant in Brooklyn where my father used to take me as a child. It had a red carpet on the floor, walnut-paneled walls, and the whitest of white-linen tablecloths. My father ordered oysters on the half shell for himself and chicken soup for me; when the waiter brought them, I could see plainly enough a spot on the sleeve of his black coat. Somehow it did not seem an unclean spot. The whole room was so warm, so rosy, so well-lit; it generated well-being. A spot on a black coat sleeve was of no moment.

However, the waitress in the motel restaurant would not have had such a spot. She did not even have the sleeve. Her bare arms were plump and clean, her hands

clean and water-reddened. So much wall-washing, probably. She wore a red-and-white-checked uniform and a white apron. Like the room, she was clean as a pin and no more comforting.

It must have been in the interval between our two largest recent wars that cleanliness and sanitation began to loom so large in our lives. This period coincided with the invention of various substitutes for natural building materials. You no longer used wood but something that looked like wood; you covered your tables, if you covered them at all, with something that imitated a tablecloth, something faintly reminiscent of the patterns in linen but otherwise having no resemblance and besides it smelled of rubber. We, like everybody we know—well, nearly everybody—use paper napkins; we make an exception of Christmas and Thanksgiving. I bring out the linen damask at those times, even though I expect to wash and iron it myself, because I want my children to remember that there is such a thing as a linen napkin. Not long ago in our town some children went to a supper party. "How was it?" their mother asked, when they got home. "Oh, it was all right," they replied, with typical childhood understatement, "but a funny thing happened. They ran out of napkins so they had to use pieces of cloth!"

Alas, for the linen pieces of cloth we used to roll up and thrust inside our napkin ring with our name on it.

We can't use them any more because they are such a nuisance to launder and besides, unless you have a clean one at every meal, they really aren't Sanitary!

It is not only the walls that can be washed and the washable tables that must be bare except for an oblong piece of rubberized mat (also washable); this is by no means the whole story. Think of the packaging. Every loaf of bread in its sealed wax-paper wrapper; every carrot in its plastic bag, and just try to open it. Boxes for sugar, sealed with heat; bags for flour, sewed up tight; coffee in tin cans. Even meat cut in pieces and wrapped in stultifying plastic. The same plastic, by the way, that will suffocate you if you put a bag of it over your head; which is what it does to the meat and vegetables, in my opinion. A child's toy cannot be examined because it is in an airtight bag; a five-cent roll of lemon drops takes several minutes to open, so bound it is in its coffin of wax paper and its outer coffin of aluminum foil.

I wonder why heads of lettuce are not enclosed. Isn't it dreadfully unsanitary to have a bunch of greens that is supposed to be eaten raw exposed to the germ-laden air of the grocery store, polluted by the fetid breath of you and me? Green beans, unwrapped, will be boiled; but lettuce! I feel I should write my Congressman at once to start a campaign for lettuce wrapping.*

When we were in Italy, we ran across an example of the American zeal for hygiene. We were invited to dine at the home of a friend in our government service and his wife. They had a couple of little boys about seven or eight and two of the prettiest kittens I ever saw, one tiger and

* I am told that history has caught up with me, as it so often does. In some markets lettuce does come in plastic bags.

one black. The kittens were not allowed in the house; cats, you know, are not clean! It was late fall and we sat down to a dinner that was being eaten all over the United States: roast turkey, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, green beans, and ice cream. "Can you get this food here in Rome?" I inquired. Certainly you could; at the PX. The housewife never shopped anywhere else. She bought her vegetables frozen, except for the potatoes. The ice cream was good American ice cream made with egg powder, milk powder, and monosodium glutamate. But it was clean. No germ dared put its foot on that little bit of American soil. We went out the next night to a restaurant in a side street patronized by taxi drivers and ate pasta with clams and a slab of something that may well have been horse. Good, too; whatever germs we absorbed were very tasty.

Of course we live longer. Here am I, getting along in my sixties and barring accidents I can easily expect another twenty years of life. It is true I may lose my memmory and be a bother to our young folks, but I'll be alive. And by then all the sheets will be drip dry and the rugs can be thrown in the washer and the food will be precooked in germ-free kitchens and frozen till it is cooked in an infra-red cooking unit, so that the only real work about taking care of me will be to push me around in my sanitary wheel chair every so often, because I know I shall want to get out of that cursed hygienic bedroom of mine.

It has gotten so I can hardly bear to look at the furniture

ads in the shiny-paper magazines. Everything is made to look like something else, all in the interest of sanitation. The furniture is upholstered with a tweedy material, but of course it is not tweed; or it looks like leather, and leather it is not. The rugs look like orientals—well, almost—but you can scrub spots out of them with a whisk and a bubble. The tables and chairs look as though they were made of wood, but that, too, is an illusion. I went through a beautiful new-built college library the other day. The use of color was very pleasant: walls painted a different color every so often. The windows were wall-wide and let in all the light and sun there was. There was a certain amount of modern art which I did not quite appreciate, but that is my fault, not the artist's or the architect's. I ran my hand over one of the reading tables, wondering what kind of wood it was. It looked like maple, perhaps; perhaps pine. Of course it wasn't wood but a composition related to the formica top of my kitchen counter. Very practical, very economical because long-lasting, quite good-looking. Easily cleaned. Easily, easily, easily cleaned! An admirable choice for library table tops. It just wasn't wood.

At a meeting of architects and construction men recently there was a lot of discussion of the new building materials. They were everything that ingenuity and know-how could devise. Easy to keep clean, too. One of the architects kept an object in his pocket and every so often he would take it out and offer it to a man nearby. The man would hold it in his hand, run his fingers over it lovingly, nod, smile, and sigh. "Beautiful!" he would say.

"Simply beautiful!" Then he would sigh again and hand it reluctantly back to its owner. It was a piece of wood.

It is an interesting fact, but I believe it is a fact, that when the great cathedrals were being built—Chartres, Sens, Amiens, Notre Dame de Paris, Ely, York, St. Peter's in Rome—although the entire population of the region was engaged in the construction, the stone masons, the wood carvers, the bell casters, the gold-leaf painters, the women who embroidered vestments and made candles, although all these people for several centuries lived with and for the building of their own great church, not one of them gave a thought to whether or not any part of it was washable. Except, of course, in the blood of the Lamb.

It may be, and it is a frightening thought, that we have substituted the quick wash for the inner cleansing. Throw it in the automatic washer takes the place of confession, penance, and forgiveness of sins. Indeed, we are suspicious today of confession, particularly of public confession. We are inclined to think it corny. *Mea culpa* is not fashionable. Keep your mouth shut; ride it out; don't admit anything and after a while they'll forget. If they don't, you're no worse off. Washing has long been known to be, in mentally disturbed persons, the other side of the coin of guilt. Are we then, we inveterate and unceasing washers and devotees of the washable, are we hiding some dark spot on the soul?

It is certainly worth thinking about. But there is more to it than that. Why do we demand material in our homes

and public buildings, on our persons, that is easily washed? If we are not hiding guilt, then we are perhaps saving time. The hours spent over the washtub in years gone by were, we are told, lost hours. So they may have been. But what of the hours we save by the automatic washer? Are we spending them satisfactorily? Moreover, why do the washable materials, the synthetics, the make-believes, why do they look like the old materials? Why have a table top that looks like wood if it is not wood? Why have upholstery material that only looks like tweed or leather? Why not have it look like the smooth, slick, highly-colored, and easily washable product of coal tar or natural gas or corn stalks that it really is?

We live in a dream where everything washes and nothing is real. Or perhaps washing is our reality. I remember long ago, when I was plagued with a series of incompetent cleaning women, making a distinction in my own mind between cleaning a room and getting it clean. You run the damp rag along the edge of the door—that is cleaning; but you don't dislodge the fingerprints—that would be getting it clean. So with our synthetics. We wash them; yet they are, in sober fact, often harder to get clean than they look. Witness the synthetic white sweaters that, after a few washings, turn grayish-yellow, or the carpets that lose the first spot but not the second or third. So it is not getting clean that we most want, but cleaning. The very act of washing, performed over and over again, is a substitute for life; it is our own *mea culpa*.

We might spend some of the hours saved by the quick wash in finding out what we are feeling guilty about.

Of course the alternative to being compulsively clean is not being dirty. Those examples of the unwashed which are familiar to me are certainly not dainty, nor are the houses in which they live. I suppose it is not cleaning that I object to, nor even being clean; it is the notion that nothing must ever get dirty. It must be constructed so that it will not. This I resent. I am not entirely consistent. If I were, I should remove the formica counter tops from my kitchen; I should take up the linoleum from the floor, leaving the wood we used to walk on and which had to be washed every day to make it look presentable.

No, I am not consistent. But you will never catch me with that tweed that is really rubber (or whatever it is); and if I can find a restaurant with a red carpet and white tablecloths, I shall always choose it in preference to the kind that can be wiped off with a damp rag.

22

Wild Animals I Have Known Too Well

When we first bought our house in the country a great deal needed to be done to it. The small buildings—tool house, wood house, corn crib, and so on—were in a pretty dilapidated state. The barns leaned. To remedy these defects we hired a student from Hampton Institute who boarded with us for two summers. A quiet, earnest boy, he was a first-class carpenter and his work still stands up after thirty-five years. He had been raised in the country in Virginia, yet he was perennially terrified by our woodlots and expected to find dangerous wild beasts behind every tree. Indeed, to my knowledge, he never looked behind a tree, so sure he was of the perils that lurked there. One day we found him down in the corner of the yard, furiously beating with a stick something that lay

on the ground. It was a small garter snake; he thought it was at least a cobra.

I am ashamed to say I took advantage of his innocence and his simplicity. I told him there were bears on the mountain above our house; oh, not big bears. Just little brown ones. I did not expect him to believe me and when I saw that he did, I hastily corrected my story and told him I had been only fooling. I had a feeling he believed me the first time and not the second. He really thought there were bears.

Now that wild life seems to be coming back to us in such numbers, I am not at all sure he was wrong.

We have always had squirrels and chipmunks and that blight of the garden, the persistent woodchuck. I have told in another place about the white squirrel that lived with us for a year; but a fourth-generation farmer in our town, who certainly knows the land if anyone does, told me a pretty story about squirrels that I have always remembered. It was one fall when the roads seemed more than usually full of gray squirrels dashing from one side to the other, right in front of the car. I remarked on this to my farmer neighbor. "Yes," he said, "once a year the squirrels all change places. They want fresh fields. That's why you see so many of them on the road; they are traveling."

I like this notion. It might be a good idea if people followed the example of the squirrels; not, I hasten to say, for the sake of fashion, but because a new locality might give them a better understanding of life.

Anyway, we have squirrels, mostly gray, but some red and a few flying squirrels with softest fur and webbed feet. The chipmunks used to live in a hole by the side door until the cats drove them out. The woodchucks have got so bold that almost any morning I can look out the window to the meadow behind the house and see a big fat one sitting up on his haunches surveying the landscape. At one point a family of woodchucks lived under our barn, and three young ones were very much put out one morning when my husband went down to get the car. They lined up and hissed at him, thrusting out their buck teeth and looking as ugly as they could, considering their size and age.

Within the last ten years the possum has come into our part of New England, pointed nose, rat tail, and all. He is not a particularly handsome fellow, but one evening when we were leaving for New York we saw Mama Possum deliberately ambling across the highway in the half dusk, followed by three delightful little ones strung out behind her. None of them was in a hurry, which is probably why so many dead possums are seen on the roads.

Friends of ours in another part of our town have porcupines so bent on neighborliness that they will not leave the woodshed even when invited at the end of a broom handle. A porcupine is not afraid of any animal, and why should he be? If you are covered with sharp knitting needles hooked at the end, you need not fear that people are going to pick you up and cuddle you; you can go

right on eating up their shelves and door jambs and floors, and if they threaten you with a broom handle you can take a bite of that.

These, however, are minor problems compared to the deer. Now a deer is a lovely thing to watch while he floats without effort over a stone wall; he is a little awkward when he walks through the orchard, eating fallen apples and flopping the white plume of his tail. We see two or three deer in the orchard almost every time we look, and another two or three in the meadow by the brook, and a few more by the salt cake we have put on a post for them down back of the house. One night at half dark when we were driving home—slowly, I am glad to say—a buck, two does, and four fawns crossed in front of the car, not more than fifty feet from us. They weren't running either.

Deer, in fact, are a menace in our part of the country, and the hunters who try to shoot them in the season are even more so. There are almost as many hunters as deer, but since the hunting season is so short, we have the deer with us longer. A farmer is permitted to shoot one deer a year and to defend his property from them if they are eating it up. So nearly everybody has a bit of deer meat now and then, and people with freezers, among whom I am not one, have a carcass cut up and wrapped in the form of chops and a saddle and haunches and whatever else a deer provides. Some friends of ours who have just built a beautiful new outdoor fireplace complete with electric spit invited us to a venison roast this fall. It was

a cloudy day, but it did not really begin to rain till about half-past five. We called our hosts and asked if the party was still on. Oh, yes, they said; if we couldn't eat out, we'd cook the roast outdoors and bring it in. When we got there we went up to look. The spit was turning steadily, a fine fire was burning under it, the roast, tied round and round with butcher's twine, was browning nicely and smelled delicious. It was raining pretty steadily but we said we didn't care; we'd eat out anyway. So we did. The venison tasted delicious, but by the time we had finished it we were wet enough to think it advisable to have our dessert and coffee by the living-room fire.

Nevertheless the deer is a menace. One fall evening not long ago we were going out to dinner. The road was winding and our speed could hardly have been as much as thirty-five miles an hour. Suddenly from the bank at my right a buck plunged into the right front fender of the car. We had no warning, and he, poor creature, did not either. Our lighting system had been knocked out, so with a flashlight we walked back a few steps and found him dead by the roadside where the car had flung him. Various steps must be taken in this emergency. We phoned, the state policeman came, he took our pedigree and a man who lived nearby was willing to take the deer (a good thing because the carcass would have been not too handy at our dinner party), the cop obligingly drove us to our destination, and somewhat later we paid a bill of nearly three hundred dollars for damage to the car. We could certainly have done without that particular deer.

Yet the wild animal which threatens to drive us out of our home is not the deer; he, after all, keeps his distance and if he happens to collide with our car he does so unwittingly. No, it is not the deer, it is the raccoon. I was at the grocer's one day when I saw that some children in a car had an animal as a pet that I could not identify. When I walked nearer I saw it was a young coon, about six weeks old, they told me, and the little fellow obligingly sat on my palm and wound his small black hands around my thumb. Coons make fine pets, I was told; the children would keep this one until he was grown and then give him back to the woods from which he came.

It may be. I have never had a coon for a pet and now that I know the species better, I am not sure I want one.

Let us begin with the corn. We were well into our first planting, eating corn two meals a day and loving every milky, tender kernel of it. When my husband went out to get the mess of corn for dinner, he was puzzled; something had been pulling the cornstalks every which way, tearing off the ears, a lot of which were on the ground half eaten. The neighbors, it turned out, were having the same trouble. Of course it was a coon; several coons, in fact, judging by the damage. We could plainly see the scratches on the fence post where they had walked up and over the four-foot wire fence that incloses our garden. They would just as easily, I am sure, have climbed a ten-foot barrier. So we did not get to eat our second planting of corn that year; the coons beat us to it. My niece hung a wire with a hundred-watt bulb on it which she kept

burning all night. We may try that next time. A farmer in our town who raises corn to sell and not just for fun, as we do, strings a wire around the top of the fence and throws a small electric charge through it. That works, or it did last summer.

Yet I am inclined to have confidence in the coons. I believe they will find a means of triumphing over these obstacles. They are said to be smart animals and I do not doubt it. They look smart; and they are always fat, so they must get plenty to eat.

The other night I was wakened by a disagreeable noise in the side yard under our window. Both our cats were indoors; and anyway this did not sound like a quarrel between cats; it sounded like pigs fighting, half snort, half snarl. I woke my husband and the sound came again. Like a brave man he went downstairs and played a flashlight through the kitchen window. There in the lilac bush, not two feet from where he stood, he had hung his wire cylinders of fat and seed and every day the downy woodpeckers and the nuthatches, sparrows, juncos, and chickadees had been helping themselves. This time it was no chickadee but two large, fat raccoons, looking at him out of their black-ringed eyes before they leaped down from the bush and ran away. It is a young lilac bush and they did a good bit of damage in their climbing. My husband went back to bed but the coons did not. They came back without quarreling out loud and ate something like two quarts of bacon fat and bird seed; they ate it all, and pulled the wire containers all awry in their greedy haste.

We could put up some more fat and seed for the birds but we don't know where to hang it. Obviously not in the lilac bush. I suppose if we got a slick metal pipe and put a collar around it, bent down and jagged at the edges; if the collar were of some durable material, say sheet steel, and the jagged points were very sharp: if we did all this, it might be that we could put the bird food on top and the coons could not get at it. We know a man who had fastened a big piece of suet from a branch of a nearby apple tree by means of a rope. The suet was disappearing faster than he thought the birds could eat it; rightly, he guessed the marauder to be a coon. He hung the suet from a chain. The coon climbed down the chain as easily as he had climbed the rope. Our man began to get stubborn; he was not, he simply was not going to have the birds' suet eaten by a coon. He hung the suet from the branch by a thin piece of wire; then he watched. He did not have to wait long; the coon climbed the tree, walked out along the branch, leaned down and pulled the wire with the suet on its end hand over hand up toward him.

This war between man and coons is not always because the animals want to steal food. Another neighbor of ours could not keep the coons off his porch. He went out a couple of times every evening and drove them away but they always came back. After a while, approaching the house from the outside, he saw why they were there. They had reached up on their hind legs and put their front paws on the window sill. They wanted to look in and see what the people were doing in that lighted room.

It reminds me of the old days of the Third Avenue Elevated, when as a child I used to love to look into the windows of the apartment houses the train passed. You could see women cooking in the kitchen or people sitting by a table eating or a girl combing her hair; I never remember seeing anything scandalous or particularly private; I never wanted to. I was just curious.

So with the raccoons. They want to know what is going on. Although I should not trust them to look quietly into the dining room with food on the table; I should expect to find them tumbling down the chimney or opening the window with their almost human paws. The raccoon is a wild creature and I should just as soon he remained in the wild, where he belongs. Let him be friends with the porcupine if he can; let him bed down with the deer or evade the skunk. Let him discover the brown bear if, as I strongly suspect, the bear is really coming down from the Adirondacks into our tamer woodlands. I don't want him in the cornpatch or in the lilac by the kitchen window. I certainly don't want to look out the window and see a pair of black-ringed eyes peeking in at me.

23

Old Friends

A WHILE ago my husband and I made a trip to San Francisco. We spent the night with a couple we have known for more than thirty years, the man having been a student of my husband's. We used to see them often, regularly in New York and every summer when they were our nearest neighbors in Connecticut; but in the last ten, maybe fifteen years, since they moved west, I don't believe I have seen either of them half a dozen times.

The visit was a great success. We found we had lots to talk about, not only to catch up with our respective lives since we had seen each other, but in general, about all sorts of subjects, on which as we used to do we more or less agreed. We were still talking busily when it was time to go to bed and we kept coming out of our bedrooms for another remark; finally we were all four out in the

hall in various stages of undress, still talking sixteen to the dozen.

In the morning I asked the wife how they liked living in San Francisco. It was a beautiful city, she said, and that was plain to see; they had met some agreeable people; they enjoyed the climate, the view of the Bay, the cosmopolitan character of the place. "It's very nice to live in really," she said. "Only of course there are no old friends. At our age you don't make friends the way you used to; there isn't time."

I have often thought of what she said. Old friends. Among our own friends are a number I knew in college or met soon after; a greater number we both met during our first New York jobs, all this being some four decades ago. We still see them, not as often as we did surely, but in any sort of exceptional situation, good or bad; if my husband receives an honor for instance or if we go through a period of strain and difficulty, we hear from them. They don't necessarily say much when they write or telephone.

Quite often they simply send us their love.

We have lived long enough in our Connecticut town to have old friends, too. People we met the magic winter of our first sabbatical leave; people we got to know soon after. We sometimes get together with the sabbatical-winter friends and laugh about old times; the night the men got to playing chess and after a while they went outdoors and one of them said, "What's that light over there in the sky?" "That," replied another, "is the sun coming up." It was late winter, so the time was between

six and seven in the morning. We laugh at the dreadful stuff we used to drink, "low proof" it was called, some sort of inferior applejack. Quite inferior as I recall it; I wouldn't touch it now; but it was during the depression and during prohibition, too, and we made our own potables, or some of us did, and drank them partly, I imagine, out of a sense of duty. It was the time when our children were babies or small children; we look at our grandchildren now and remember those days with wry fondness. We remember square dances and evening picnics at the lake and going swimming by moonlight and getting stuck in the mud in the spring and things like that. We remember them together, because we have known each other for a long time. It would be hard, probably, for our younger friends whom we have not known so long to think of us doing the gay or foolish things they themselves do. We did them; and our old friends know it.

We went to a holiday party recently. It was a pleasant party and our hosts were old friends, too. But they have moved away and their guests were almost all strange to us. They were friendly people and easy to talk to, of course; but on the way home we said somehow the parties at home were more fun. People we see all the time, nothing new or surprising about them; we know when we can talk politics with them because they think as we do and when we can't unless we want to get into an exhausting and meaningless argument. We are likely to exchange gifts at Christmas and birthdays, gifts we have made ourselves maybe, some of us being much more

clever than others at making things. It doesn't matter; it is the feeling of being old friends that matters.

I talked with a neighbor last year about retirement. He lives in our town in the summers, but winters he spends in New York as we used to do. He didn't know about living in the country all year around. He thought frankly that he would be bored seeing the same old people and not, in his opinion, the most interesting people in the world at that. It may be; who of us is interesting, who is not? It all depends on how you feel. I found myself talking the other day to the husband of a girl we know quite well; I had always thought him amiable but stuffy. He wasn't in the least, he talked very well, his ideas were mature and even impressive. Whose fault was it that I had thought him uninteresting, his or mine? Incidentally, the man who was afraid he would be bored is himself more often than not boring; this is not only my own opinion, I hear it from others, too. Yet again, if I knew how to talk to him, perhaps I should find him fascinating.

At the beginning of this book I named four women; one of them was in school and college with me, one in college, the other two I have known since before I was married, perhaps since 1920. Two I see now very rarely. Yet I feel that there is something important we have in common; it is not only that we were schoolmates or that we worked in the same office or that our husbands are very close friends. It is that I feel I can count on them in a crisis. I know they can count on me. We are, in short, old friends.

Nor are they the only women I feel this way about and know this well. Old friends are good to have.

The other day I met a woman who had been born and raised in Eastern Europe; she had grown up, to the age of mid-childhood at least, on a big farm where as she said they raised everything they ate—everything. When she found herself in the American Middle West at the age of ten or so she almost starved to death. They gave her milk, she said, but she could not drink it: "I didn't know the cow!" The bread—what was it made of? Perhaps wheat, perhaps some other grain, but she had not seen it being broadcast in the brown, plowed earth, poking its green tips up in the spring, ripening golden at harvest. "How could I be sure what it was?" she said. So with potatoes. "They sent me to the store for two pounds of potatoes. Two pounds of potatoes! At our old place there was a bin for red potatoes, higher than my head, and one for seed potatoes, and one for some other kind. How could one buy two pounds of potatoes?"

It took her some six months to get to the point where, in spite of her unfamiliarity with the food, she could eat some of it, dubiously.

The trouble with her was that all her old friends, even the cow, were gone.

I have thought about this often, in connection with the hundreds of thousands of refugees who during our time have been forced to leave all that was familiar to them and begin a new life in a new country where everything was strange. My son's parents-in-law shut the door on the

house their only child was born in, a house comfortably furnished, complete with embroidered linen and silver, and with the paintings of its mistress still hanging on the walls. They knew almost for a certainty, although their ten-year-old daughter did not, that when they took ship for America they would never see their house again. Nor will they. They embarked for a new land where they did not know a word of the language, where they had only one connection, a brother and his family.

I have tried to think how this would be, how it would feel. It is hard for me to imagine. I have always said I could live anywhere, the place is not important, it is the familiar and best-loved faces that matter. I should not want to try living in a new place alone; otherwise, I said, it would be bearable, even exciting. Thinking of these brave people and the many, many thousands like them who left everything they loved, everything that they knew, their customs, their way of preparing food, the familiar view from the windows, the streets near their home, the walk to school, to the place of business, to the shop, the position of the mail box, the face of the nursemaid or the cook, even the climate—and their friends, in many cases members of their families, brothers and sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles; thinking of them and of starting a new life as they did, I wonder if I should have been equal to it. Under the circumstances, I suppose I should; we do what we have to do; but leaving old friends would have been one of the hardest parts of it.

Is this the familiar and often derided American need

for security? Is this why I do not want a house that can be packed up and moved to another city, or walls that move about to change the shape of the room at will? Or is it just myself? Am I an old stick-in-the-mud, afraid of change because I am too old or too old-fashioned, a hopeless case of whose sort the pioneers were clearly not made? It may be. One of my old friends fancies that she would have loved the role of pioneer woman; she yearns for the days of the covered wagon, the ox-trail westward, the life free from eternally counting the laundry and telephoning for the bread. It is true that, compared to our stationary life, she and her family have moved many times, to the South, to the Midwest, to the Far West. Yet one curious thing has happened in all these removes. We have visited them in each of their new homes; every house they have lived in looks unmistakably like their house. Not always the same furniture, because they have rented furnished houses from time to time; but the same arrangement of furniture. Invariably a few of the same small objects: the copper jar, the wooden plates, the Navajo rugs, which make the new house into their home. Incidentally, when they get back from their travels, back to New England, as they always do, they come to us and we instantly behave like the old friends we are.

Long ago some of our friends had a conversation about us which they later reported. We, they said, were among all their acquaintances the ones who most definitely had roots, who had stayed put, who could be counted on to be living in the same place next year or the year after. I

was not sure then nor am I now that this is a good thing, but I expect it is true. We bought our country place the year after we were married; we have never lived in any other country house. We lived in our city house for thirty years, after which we sold it and moved to the country house. What a lack of imagination this connotes, or may connote, for all I know. Our sabbatical leaves were not spent in France or in Mexico or in China; no, indeed, we merely moved to Connecticut, to the house we already knew so well. We did move about now and then, we took trips; but we always came home again.

Personally I think we were lucky. We were able to live the same sort of life in the same place, to see the same folks, to do the same sort of work; but I am aware that many people would think this sort of life was deadly dull. They may be right. It may be a dull life; knowing the same people well for most of our adult life may be dull. Never having had the experience of living in other cities or countries, really living there, not as a tourist—that may be dull, too. We should have learned some languages, instead of having a feeble schoolbook competence in French and German and a miserable smattering of Spanish. The truth was that when our children were growing up we at first didn't want to leave and then we were prevented by a war from leaving; or we thought we were. Other people left; other adventurous souls got overseas jobs and sent their children to foreign schools. We stayed put. I claim no superiority for this; it was the way it happened, it is the way we are.

For us, we live the life we like. We like familiar objects; we like the same house. I go so far as to like the same way of placing furniture, but my children correct me on this. Most particularly we like the same friends; the ones we have known for quite a while. We like to get together with them at their houses or at our house, eat dinner, sit by the fire, and talk. We don't play bridge with them or canasta, we don't usually listen to music; we don't recite poetry or do charades (I hate charades). We just talk and after a while they go home or we do. I say it was a nice evening, wasn't it. A nice evening; rather a mild remark. But it was nice, it was pleasant, it was friendly. It was, indeed, full of love, unexpressed in ordinary times but in extraordinary times often clearly stated. In extraordinary times, in times of trouble, it is heart-moving to find how many old friends say they love you.

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KEEP CARD IN POCKET

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